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## Goals of the *Africanus Journal*

The *Africanus Journal* is an award-winning interdisciplinary biblical, theological, and practical journal of the Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME). Its goals are to promote:

- a. the mission and work of the members and mentors of the Africanus Guild Ph.D. Research Program of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston;
- b. the principles of the Africanus Guild (evangelical orthodox Christian men and women who are multicultural, multiracial, urban-oriented, studying a Bible without error in a cooperative way);
- c. Christian scholarship that reflects an evangelical perspective, as an affiliate of GCTS-Boston. This is an interdisciplinary journal that publishes high quality articles in areas such as biblical studies, theology, church history, religious research, case studies, and studies related to practical issues in urban ministry. Special issues are organized according to themes or topics that take seriously the contextual nature of ministry situated in the cultural, political, social, economic, and spiritual realities in the urban context.

Scholarly papers may be submitted normally by those who have or are in (or are reviewed by a professor in) a Th.M., M.Div., Ed.D., Th.D., S.T.D., Ph.D., or equivalent degree program.

Two issues normally are published per year.

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## Life of Julius Africanus

Julius Africanus was probably born in Jerusalem, many scholars think around A.D. 200. Africanus was considered by the ancients as a man of consummate learning and sharpest judgment (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* 6:128). He was a pupil of Heracles, distinguished for philosophy and other Greek learning, in Alexandria, Egypt around A.D. 231–233. In A.D. 220/226, he performed some duty in behalf of Nicopolis (formerly Emmaus) in Palestine. Later he likely became bishop of Emmaus (Eusebius, *History*, VI.xxxi.2). Origen calls him “a beloved brother in God the Father, through Jesus Christ, His holy Child” (*Letter from Origen to Africanus* 1). Fellow historian Eusebius distinguishes him as “no ordinary historian” (*History*, I. vi.2). Eusebius describes the five books of *Chronologies* as a “monument of labor and accuracy” and cites extensively from his harmony of the evangelists’ genealogies (*History*, VI. xxxi. 1–3). Africanus was a careful historian who sought to defend the truth of the Bible. He is an ancient example of meticulous, detailed scholarship which is historical, biblical, truthful, and devout.

Even though Eusebius describes Africanus as the author of the *Kestoi*, Jerome makes no mention of this (*ANF* 6:124). The author of *Kestoi* is surnamed Sextus, probably a Libyan philosopher who arranged a library in the Pantheon at Rome for the Emperor. The *Kestoi* was probably written toward the end of the 200s. It was not written by a Christian since it contains magical incantations (*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* III.412).

The Greek text of Africanus’ writings may be found in Martinus Josephus Routh, *Reliquiae sacrae* II (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974 [1846]), 225–309, and Martin Wallraff, Umberto Roberto, Karl Pinggéra, eds., William Adler, trans., *Julius Africanus Chronographiae: The Extant Fragments, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 15 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

The extant writings of Julius Africanus may be found in vol. 1, no 1, April 2009 edition of the *Africanus Journal*.

## Other Front Matter

*Editorial Team for the issue:* Cassidy Jay Gossage, J. Saemi Kim, Seong Park, Nicole Rim, John Runyon, Aída Besançon Spencer, William David Spencer

### *Resources:*

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### *Summary of Content:*

Five articles are on five different topics: apologetics, the end times, biblical studies, counseling, and evangelism. The book reviews discuss evangelism, eschatology, counseling, biblical studies, theology, and biographies.

# THE AFRICANUS GUILD



L to R: Quonekuia Day, Mark Chuanhang Shan, Jennifer Creamer

*“If not for the Africanus Guild, I would not even think of getting a Ph.D. and would not have had the chance to teach my own course at Gordon-Conwell, and be trained to be a Bible teacher, and for this I am most grateful.” –Benjamin Fung*

Benjamin Fung’s Ph.D. was received from North-West University in South Africa 2017  
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The Africanus Guild is a support program set up to assist selective, underrepresented constituencies to pursue research Ph.D.s from North-West University and London School of Theology. The Guild is especially oriented to the multicultural, multiracial urban scene. Accepted students are mentored by a Gordon-Conwell faculty member. Candidates may complete the Th.M. at the Boston campus and then apply to the Guild.

# Can the Jesus of the Bible Be Found in Hinduism? <sup>1</sup>

SARAH GODWIN

This article will explore the differences between Hinduism and Christianity as they relate to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Working from primary sources including the Bible, creedal statements of the Church and orthodox Christian theology, it will present Jesus as the redeemer-king of humanity. Through analysis of sacred Hindu texts and other primary sources espousing Hindu faith and practice, this article will investigate and expose the differences implicit in the Hindu conception of Jesus Christ. After explaining how Hindu and Christian belief systems differ according to their divergent views of Jesus, this article will conclude by offering some practical recommendations that could bring an adherent of Hinduism into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

## The Person and Work of the Orthodox Christian Jesus

According to the scriptural witness of the Bible and the subsequent creedal statements of the early Christian church, orthodox Christians around the world affirm that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who took on human flesh in order to fulfill his role as the redeemer-king of humankind. It is imperative to understand that Jesus was fully divine and fully human in his earthly life and ministry, which is his unique position in the Godhead and an identity unparalleled among humanity at any time before or since.

The Nicene Creed affirmed that Jesus is “the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father.” Similarly, the Chalcedonian Creed affirmed that Jesus is “consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead.” These are not simply ideas birthed from a zealous religious community, rather these creeds maintain the timeless truths of God’s revealed word. As recorded in the New Testament, Jesus repeatedly laid claim to his divinity. For example, he said to his disciples, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9) and in this oneness he made clear that “no one comes to the Father” except through him (John 14:6).<sup>2</sup> The Apostle Paul, who initially violently opposed those who claimed Jesus’s divinity, later wrote of him that “he is the image of the invisible God...in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1:15, 19).

Not only is Jesus of the same divine essence as God the Father, but his role in the eternal Godhead affirms his pre-existence to and active role in creation. Jesus himself claimed his infinite divinity when he spoke of himself using the divine name of God, clearly recognized by the Jewish people, when he said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). His declaration was received as an obvious identification of himself with the Holy God of Israel who made himself known to Moses in ancient times.<sup>3</sup> Such an assertion about the nature of God is consistent with the language used in the creation account recorded in Genesis as it was inspired in ancient Hebrew. At the pinnacle of creation, God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26). The Hebrew term for God, *Elohim*, exists in plural form; it can sometimes mean multiple “gods” but is most commonly used to refer to the LORD who reveals himself in Scripture, the God who is one and created the world out of the love of the Triune Godhead. For while the biblical witness attests to three co-existent and co-essential persons of God—Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit—it is simultaneously clear that there is only one God.<sup>4</sup> The Apostle John confirmed Jesus’s divinity within the Triune God, affirming his role in God’s creative acts, when he

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1 This article was originally written for Professor Rev. Dr. William David Spencer for the class Theology Survey 1 offered at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston Campus, Fall 2019.

2 ESV unless otherwise noted.

3 Cf. Ex 3:14.

4 Cf. Deut 6:4: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”

began his Gospel account by saying, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him” (John 1:1-3). Here John used the Greek term *logos*, translated as “Word,” as a circumlocution for Jesus. He was declaring that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed God. Likewise the Apostle Paul spoke of Jesus’s unified role in the creative work of the Godhead when he declared that all things were created “by him...through him and for him” (Col 1:16); he identified Jesus as the eternal God when he said, “he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17).

Not only is Jesus Christ fully divine, but he became fully human when he took on flesh in historical space and time. The New Testament records numerous instances of Jesus demonstrating human needs such as hunger, thirst, and fatigue.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, the apostle provided a human genealogy for Jesus, “the son of David, the son of Abraham,” establishing the fleshly line of his ancestry (Matt 1:1-2). Just as the Triune God, including the Son, declared each stage of his creation to be “good” (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), with the pinnacle at the formation of humanity having been called “very good” (Gen 1:31), thus the incarnation of Jesus affirmed God’s plan to redeem his very good creation from the curse of sin. Jesus likened himself to the apex of all created beings when he “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14; cf. Heb 2:14-15) as God “gave his only Son...in order that the world might be saved through him” so that “whoever believes in him is not condemned” to the consequences of sin (John 3:16-18).

Notably, even as Jesus demonstrated his full humanity “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3), he was without sin (Heb 4:15). The Nicene Creed stated that “he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human...he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again.” The Council of Chalcedon agreed by identifying Jesus as “consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin.” The Apostle Paul expressed God’s purpose in Jesus’s incarnation by explaining that “for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus was “tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:1-13), “humbled himself” (Phil 2:8), and was “born under the law” (Gal 4:4); the author of Hebrews affirmed that he was “in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). Even in his humanity he was “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb 1:3). Jesus could be human yet sinless because he was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit, as predicted by Old Testament prophecy: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (Is 7:14).<sup>6</sup> Paul emphasized the significance that Adam did not supply the seed of Jesus’s humanity for “just as sin came into the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin...much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:12-17).

Jesus’s unique role in history as Immanuel (“God with us”) is important because he fulfilled the covenant promises of the one true God, revealed in the Old Testament. Matthew recorded his lineage in order to show his descent from Abraham and David, fulfilling these respective covenants with these chosen men.<sup>7</sup> Paul highlighted Jesus’s perfect blood sacrifice in fulfillment of the Mosaic Law and his perfect atonement as the second Adam to bring righteousness to all by faith.<sup>8</sup> Jesus offered his body “once for all” as “a single sacrifice” for the sins of humanity (Heb 10:10, 14). His death and resurrection fulfilled God’s covenant of grace, effecting the promises of the Abrahamic (Gen 12:1-3), Mosaic (Ex 19-24) and Davidic (2 Sam 7:12-16) Covenants. As the offspring of Eve (Gen 3:15), Jesus bruised the enemy’s head (Rom 16:20) and conquered sin and death (1 Cor

5 Hunger, cf. Matt 4:2: “he was hungry.” Thirst, cf. John 4:7: “Give me a drink;” John 19:28: “I thirst.” Fatigue, cf. Mark 4:38: “but he was in the stern, asleep on a cushion;” John 4:6: “Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey.”

6 Cf. Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35.

7 Cf. Matt 1:1, 16. Abrahamic Covenant, cf. Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-22. Davidic Covenant, cf. 2 Sam 7:12-17.

8 Cf. Rom 3:24-26: “Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith”; 5:12-21.



15:55-57) to save all who would be “born again” (John 3:3) by believing on his name and with them established God’s eternal kingdom (John 3:14-16). The redemption offered by the blood of Christ was a work of grace that was not and could not be earned by the religious works of any human.<sup>9</sup>

### Hinduism as It Relates to Jesus

Hinduism is a diverse, ancient, and complex belief system and way of life such that it is no simple endeavor to convey a concise and singular Hindu view of the person and work of Jesus. Indeed, in Hindu thought, religious facets such as belief or temple membership are often not so highly regarded as spiritual practice, or Sadhana.<sup>10</sup> Not only are there numerous sacred Hindu texts esteemed with varying levels of authority according to particular sects or practice, notably all of these writings antedate the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ; thus there is no specific mention of the incarnate Son of God by name. In order to assess a Hindu viewpoint toward Jesus, this section will survey some basic, broadly accepted tenets of Hindu faith by exploring a portion of prominent sacred literature as well as the viewpoints of some present-day Hindu thinkers and gurus.

Across the many strands of Hinduism, belief in an all-pervasive Supreme Being is paramount—a Being who is at once immanent and transcendent, “Creator and Unmanifest Reality.”<sup>11</sup> In describing the creative act of this Supreme Being, a representative Vedic hymn portrays an impersonal force bringing forth all existence from non-existence; the sacred text sings, “Whence this creation has arisen - perhaps it formed itself or perhaps it did not - the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows - or perhaps he does not know.”<sup>12</sup> Rather than a loving God who created the world out of his goodness, this view of the God in Hinduism suggests one of supreme consciousness; his existence pervading the material world and inhabiting the hearts of all “living entities” (humans), yet the human consciousness is “contaminated by matter.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, a devout Hindu would understand that the *Bhagavad-Gita* was a revelation of God to deliver humans unto a pure state of consciousness from the corrupting influence of the material world.<sup>14</sup>

Notably within its pantheistic catalogue, Hinduism develops a concept of a Trinity, a Supreme Godhead, yet with essential differences from the Triune God of Christianity. The Supreme Being as discussed above is often called Brahman or perhaps Krishna — the supreme controller and highest in the hierarchy of the gods.<sup>15</sup> It is generally accepted within the Hindu tradition that the three highest gods next to Brahman are Brahma, creator of the universe, Vishnu, the preserver and protector, and Shiva, the destroyer. “The three are considered different aspects of the same Brahman and Brahman himself in their essential nature.”<sup>16</sup>

In Hinduism, the individual soul, known as Atman, is a manifestation of the Supreme Being that exists in human form as enveloped by nature and “remains bound to the mind and body and the cycle of births and deaths.”<sup>17</sup> Though the soul shares in the eternal and infinite nature of the Supreme, it is infinitely chained to material corruption. *The Bhagavad-Gita* states, “As a person

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9 Cf. Eph 1:7, 10; 2:8-9.

10 Shaunaka Rishi Das, “Jesus in Hinduism,” *BBC*, March 24, 2009, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/beliefs/jesus\\_1.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/beliefs/jesus_1.shtml).

11 Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, “Hindu Basics: Four Denominations, Four Facts, Nine Beliefs,” *Himalayan Academy Publications*, accessed Nov. 16, 2019, <https://www.himalayanacademy.com/media/books/hindu-basics/web/toc.html>.

12 *Rig Veda* 10.129.7.

13 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *The Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*, Complete Ed., Rev. Enlarged ed. Herts, (U.K.: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1986), xxiii, xxiv.

14 Bhaktivedanta Swami, *The Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*, xxi.

15 *Ibid.*, xxii.

16 Jayaram V, “Hinduism in a Nutshell for the Beginners,” *Hindu Website*, accessed Nov. 16, 2019, <https://www.hinduwebsite.com/beliefs.asp>.

17 *Ibid.*



sheds worn-out garments and wears new ones, likewise, at the time of death, the soul casts off its worn-out body and enters a new one.”<sup>18</sup>

In relation to such perspectives about the material world, Hinduism embraces the concept of incarnation in particular ways. Though in some respects a Hindu adherent would agree with a Christian that God can take on human form, the purpose and process of incarnation differs greatly. In accord with Hinduism’s belief that the material world is inherently corrupt save for the intervention of a god, Hindu incarnation is a necessary response to a decline in dharma, or the moral failings of humanity.<sup>19</sup> *The Bhagavad-Gita* states: “Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness, O Arjun, at that time I manifest myself on earth. To protect the righteous, to annihilate the wicked, and to reestablish the principles of dharma I appear on this earth, age after age.”<sup>20</sup> Given that Hinduism contends that the universe undergoes innumerable cycles of creation, preservation, and dissolution, it posits the repeated need for divine incarnations again and again “to reclaim the conditioned souls.”<sup>21</sup>

As the god of preservation and protection, the incarnations of Vishnu are plentiful. Upon the decline of dharma, many Hindus believe that Lord Vishnu incarnates and reincarnates as a living being — whether human, animal, or mythical — to destroy evil and restore the balance of good and evil.<sup>22</sup> *The Puranas* record the presence of Vishnu at creation, declaring his shared essence with the Supreme Being and also his four initial incarnations as Purusha (spirit), Pradhāna (crude matter), Vyakta (visible substance), and Kāla (time).<sup>23</sup> Beyond his role at creation, Hindu texts enumerate many subsequent reincarnations of Vishnu as preserver and protector of the universe. Though there is not complete consensus as to the number of Vishnu incarnations, most Hindus would agree to these primary incarnations (or avatars): Matsyavatara (fish), Kurmavatara (tortoise), Varahavatara (boar), Narasimhavatara (man-lion), Vamanavatara (dwarf), Prashuramavatara (priestly warrior), Sri Ramavatara (virtuous prince and king), Sri Krishnavatara (cowherd and leader/slayer of evil), Buddhavatara (the enlightened Buddha, who established Buddhism), Balarama (the brother of Krishna) and Kalkyavatara (sword-wielding and horse riding Kalki, his final forecasted avatar who will destroy all evil forces to end the present age).<sup>24</sup>

### Hindu Soteriology

Given the orthodox Christian understanding of Jesus Christ as the redeemer-king of humankind, before contrasting the Christian and Hindu views of Jesus, readers might find helpful an assessment of the way of salvation in Hindu belief and practice. As noted above, the ways of Hinduism are varied and complex, so consideration of this topic will survey broad foundational concepts of Hindu belief with particular focus given to Vaishnava Hinduism (devotees of Vishnu).

At its essence, Hinduism is a religion of works; foundational to belief and practice are the concepts of dharma (obligatory moral duty) and karma (the fruit of desire-driven activities).<sup>25</sup> Because of the contamination of the material world, human beings cannot uphold the eternal law of the Supreme Being and thus must purify their activities (a practice known as bhakti) to draw their consciousness back from material entanglement.<sup>26</sup> *The Upanishads* speak to this in saying, “According as one acts, according as one conducts himself, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good. The doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad

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18 *Bhagavad-Gita* 2:22.

19 V, “Hinduism in a Nutshell.”

20 *Bhagavad-Gita* 4:7-8.

21 Bhaktivedanta Swami, *The Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*, xxvii.

22 Jayaram V, “The Concept of Avatar or Incarnation in Hinduism,” *Hindu Website*, accessed Nov. 16, 2019, <https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/concepts/avatar.asp>.

23 *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, Book I, Chapter II.

24 V, “Avatar or Incarnation in Hinduism.”

25 V, “Hinduism in a Nutshell.”

26 Bhaktivedanta Swami, *The Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*, xxiv.

action.”<sup>27</sup> Because Hinduism is predicated on the cyclical nature of the universe, Hindus “believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained.”<sup>28</sup> So one’s karma determines one’s state of being in the next cycle of life. Hindu salvation consists of being united with the Supreme Being. *The Bhagavad-Gita* states that the final devotion of the mind at the end of one cycle would deliver a soul to the object of that devotion: “when you constantly engage the mind in remembering Me, the Supreme Divine Personality, without deviating, you will certainly attain Me.”<sup>29</sup> Under the system of karma, the individual self is eternally yoked to the material body while “the liberation of the embodied soul is the highest ultimate purpose of human life.”<sup>30</sup>

Devotion is widely considered the most supreme of the numerous methods and approaches to achieve moksha, liberation from the karmic cycles.<sup>31</sup> Vaishnava Hindus consider devotion to Vishnu as vital to attaining liberation, given that he is the preserver and maintainer of the universal order.<sup>32</sup> Practices of Vishnu devotion often include chanting or singing Vishnu’s name (bhajan), meditating upon his form (dharana), and performing deity worship (puja).<sup>33</sup> Vaishnava saint Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is quoted as saying, “Who chants the holy name of Krishna just once may be considered a Vaishnava. Such a person is worshipable and is the topmost human being.”<sup>34</sup>

Like much in Hinduism, the concept of sin exists as a duality, Pāpam and Punyam. Sin (Pāpam) involves a formation or a consequence of desire-ridden actions, dereliction of dharma, in contrast to Punyam, which may best be understood as virtue or merit.<sup>35</sup> Sin may otherwise be recognized as ignorance concerning reality; as the *Bhagavad-Gita* states, “In that joyous state of Yog, called samādhi, one experiences supreme boundless divine bliss, and thus situated, one never deviates from the Eternal Truth. Having gained that state, one does not consider any attainment to be greater. Being thus established, one is not shaken even in the midst of the greatest calamity.”<sup>36</sup> Thus Hindu atonement for sin occurs through transmigration, working out one’s own salvation by the individual payment of debt according to the karma of previous life cycles, in hopes of reuniting with the highest consciousness of Supreme Reality. This karmic debt cannot be paid by another, but is the burden of the individual self; yet a Vaishnava Hindu believes that Vishnu may grant liberation through devotion. As the *Bhagavad-Gita* says, “My devotees, though performing all kinds of actions, take full refuge in me. By my grace, they attain the eternal and imperishable abode.”<sup>37</sup> Through such devotion and striving, Vaishnava Hinduism is most apparently a self-rescuing religion.

### Contrast of Christian and Hindu Views of Salvation

The purpose of this article is to identify and analyze the implicitly or explicitly divergent views of Jesus Christ found in Hinduism. Having surveyed some of the most relevant tenets of Christianity and Hinduism, it is prudent at this point to note how these belief systems disagree in their respective postures toward Jesus.

27 *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.5.

28 Subramuniyaswami, “Hindu Basics.”

29 *Bhagavad-Gita* 8:8.

30 V, “Hinduism in a Nutshell.”

31 V, “Hinduism in a Nutshell.”

32 Jayaram V, “Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, the Highest Gods of Hinduism,” *Hindu Website*, accessed Nov. 16, 2019, <https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/hindutrinity.asp>.

33 “Vaishnavism in a nutshell,” *Sri Lanka News and Information Portal*, accessed Nov. 16, 2019, <http://infolanka.asia/religion-and-culture/hinduism/vaishnavism-in-a-nutshell>.

34 Ibid.

35 Jayaram V, “The Concept of Sin in Hinduism,” *Hindu Website*, accessed Nov. 16, 2019, [https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h\\_sin.asp](https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h_sin.asp).

36 *Bhagavad-Gita* 6:21-22.

37 *Bhagavad-Gita* 18:56.

As noted above, the *Rig Veda* attributes the creation of all things to a supreme, unknowable, impersonal being. A line from the same Vedic hymn quoted previously says, “Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe. Who then knows whence it has arisen?”<sup>38</sup> This would indicate that, though there was a mysterious presence of a Supreme Being, the pantheon of inferior divinities was not present at the time of the initial creative event. Subsequent Vedic hymns and sacred texts in the Hindu canon expound upon the creation narrative as Hinduism evolved.<sup>39</sup> For instance, the *Puranas* elaborate upon Lord Vishnu as “the cause of creation, preservation, and destruction,” “in infinite form. He is the Supreme, the giver of all good.”<sup>40</sup> This creative process of Vishnu occurs in a cyclical manifestation and dissolution over several periods, called Kalpas; thus the world is repeatedly created and dissolved in periodical revolution, much like the changing of environmental seasons.<sup>41</sup>

This cyclical creative activity stands in contrast to the creation narrative of the Bible. Regardless of whether one interprets the Genesis 1 account as describing six twenty-four hour days or longer successive time periods, the Christian faith claims only one complete creation event. As opposed to the *Purana* account, where Brahma creates and recreates in response to the defectiveness of his initial creation, the God of the Bible reveals that each stage of his initial creation was deemed “good” (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25).<sup>42</sup> Hindus and Christians may find agreement that the formation of humankind was the pinnacle of creation; yet, whereas Brahma found the ultimate objects of his creation to be “afflicted by evil,” in whom “the qualities of darkness and foulness predominate,” the Christian God celebrated the completion of his creation, male and female humanity made in his own image, as “very good” (Gen 1:31).<sup>43</sup>

Relatedly, the Hindu conception of a “Trinity” does not posit a triune nature to the one Supreme Being, rather Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are different manifestations of the “primal all-pervading spirit” of the Supreme, embodying his different qualities and activities.<sup>44</sup> Yet, as detailed above, Jesus exists eternally within the Triune Godhead - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - co-existing in perfect love and unity. He is not just one manifestation of God according to role or characteristic, but he is “begotten from the Father before all ages...begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father.”<sup>45</sup> It is because of this that the Apostle John could declare that he was “in the beginning with God” and that “all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3). In his perfect unity with God, “by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16-17).

Christianity celebrates the God who created the world out of his inter-trinitarian love and goodness. God could say, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen 1:26), because of his unified Triune existence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - the great “I am” (Ex 3:14).<sup>46</sup> Jesus is one with God, whereas Vishnu is one of many gods; Jesus presided over and maintains all of creation for all of time in his perfect power (Col 1:17), yet Vishnu preserves and maintains creation only for limited times, subjected to the repetition of dissolution.

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38 *Rig Veda*, 10.129.6.

39 Jayaram V, “Creation Theories in Hinduism,” *Hindu Website*, accessed Nov. 16, 2019, <https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/concepts/creation.asp>.

40 *Vishnu Purāṇa*, Book I, Chs. I, II.

41 *Vishnu Purāṇa*, Book I, Ch. IV.

42 *Ibid.*, Book I, Ch. V.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*, Book I, Ch. II.

45 The Nicene Creed.

46 Jesus identified himself as “I am” in John 8:58 in keeping with the oneness of God proclaimed by the Jews for generations (Deut 6:4).

Not only does the Bible's creation account affirm the goodness of God's material design established in and through Jesus, but the incarnation of the Son of God likewise elevates the form of the created image-bearers and brings honor to the natural world. To be sure, Christians agree that the material world is in decay, yet the word of God explains that it was subjected to the destructive effects of sin as humanity chose to turn away from its loving Creator.<sup>47</sup> Rather than destroy his creation and start again, the God of the Bible reaffirmed his good plans by giving, of himself, his only Son, who entered the historical space and time of humankind to redeem what was enslaved to death.<sup>48</sup>

Quite apparently Hinduism also maintains a theology of incarnation for the purpose of redemption; as noted above, Lord Vishnu incarnates as a part of his role in maintaining and restoring the created order. As such, a Vaishnava Hindu can easily hold space to accept Jesus's incarnation as yet another manifestation of Vishnu during the present iteration of creation. As one modern Hindu adherent says: "you don't have to *not* believe in Jesus in order to be a Vaishnava."<sup>49</sup> If Jesus is just another Vishnu avatar, then Hindus find no incongruity between claiming faith in Jesus and maintaining a pantheistic worldview. The problem, of course, is that the Jesus in whom they would believe would not be Jesus as he revealed himself. *The Bhagavad-Gita* posits that an embodied soul will take on flesh and cast it off before taking on a new form, thus the physical form would have no meaningful relationship with the nature of the deity within.<sup>50</sup> Yet, when Jesus the Son of God "took on flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14) he was also "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3). Thus, the essence of Hindu incarnation allows only for an erroneous, docetic view of Jesus, in that he only appeared to be a man, but his divine nature could not truly have coexisted with the corrupting influence of human flesh.<sup>51</sup>

Christians, however, have long understood that Jesus is "consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood...to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably...concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons."<sup>52</sup> As his divine and human natures interacted, he was tempted, yet without sin, giving up some of his divine rights as he humbled himself to be one born under the law.<sup>53</sup> Jesus Christ was no avatar; he is the Son of God, who, though he "knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21), was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3) to redeem the spiritual and physical bodies of human beings.

Further, Vaishnava understanding of Jesus as an avatar implies that he was simply one among many manifestations of the Supreme Being, come to redeem one of many corrupted creations. Yet Jesus did not present himself as one among the many. It is only by the "one man Jesus Christ," conceived by the Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, that humans may find redemption for the inherited sin of Adam that "came into the world through one man" (Rom 5:12, 15).<sup>54</sup> For Jesus himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6) and "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus cannot be one among many ways to God. Only through his unique role as redeemer-king can humankind be "sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10).

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47 cf. Gen 3:14-19.

48 The Apostle Matthew records Jesus's earthly genealogy as a descendent of the promises to Abraham and David (Matt 1:1-2).

49 "Jesus, the Vaishnavas, and the spirit of understanding," *The Vaishnava Voice*, August 6, 2009, <https://deshika.wordpress.com/2009/08/06/jesus-the-vaishnavas-and-the-spirit-of-understanding/>.

50 *Bhagavad-Gita* 2:22.

51 "Docetism's central thesis is that Jesus only seemed to be human. God could not really have become material, since all matter is evil, and he is perfectly pure and holy. The transcendent God could not possibly have united with such a corrupting influence." Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 651.

52 The Chalcedonian Creed.

53 Luke 4:1-13 and Heb 4:15 speak to the sinless temptation of Jesus; Phil 2:8 portrays his intentional humility as one "born under the law" (Gal 4:4).

54 Cf. Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35 in fulfillment of Is 7:14.

Thus, Hindu soteriology is decidedly incompatible with the person and work of Jesus Christ. A Vaishnava Hindu attempting to believe in Jesus would have to reject a belief in transmigration, working out their own debts according to karma. Though they would likely agree in part that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” a karmic worldview of reincarnation would not allow that followers of Jesus “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom 3:23-25). Hinduism relies on human works to improve oneself throughout numerous life cycles in hopes of receiving liberation (*moksha*) from corruption. While Jesus also taught that “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3), this spiritual rebirth happens only once and only by faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 3:16) to forgive human sin; whereas Hindus would assert that one cannot pay the karmic debt of another, Christians align themselves with Jesus Christ who “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (Heb 10:14). He fulfilled the ancient covenant promises of God, such that the Apostle Paul could proclaim that “it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works” (Eph 2:8-9).<sup>55</sup>

Interestingly, though it is indeed a religion of works, Hinduism also maintains that in the end everyone will be liberated, all will be saved. For a Vaishnava Hindu, according to the grace of Vishnu “they attain the eternal and imperishable abode.”<sup>56</sup> This is how one modern adherent can write, “when we all get to heaven – as we all ultimately will...”<sup>57</sup> For a Hindu, the karmic cycle and varying levels of devotion to a deity will inevitably lead to reunion with the Supreme Consciousness. Though redemption through Jesus is certainly according to his grace, the promise of his salvation cannot be applied universally apart from faith in his substitutionary and completed work, for he said of himself that “whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18).<sup>58</sup> Only those who confess Jesus as Lord, as the sole perfect sacrifice for their sins, “have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of...trespasses, according to the riches of his grace... to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1: 7, 10).

### Can a Hindu Become a Christian?

After contrasting such disparate views of Jesus and the way of salvation, one may wonder how to overcome the apparent divisions. Though there will surely be significant obstacles when inviting a Hindu adherent to consider Christianity, one may have hope in the work and grace of Jesus who conquered even death to reconcile his very enemies to himself. Included below are some suggested ideas for Christians who want to help Hindu friends know the saving power of Jesus.

As previously stated, Hinduism is more than just a dogmatic system of belief; rather to be Hindu is to enjoy a way of life that includes a strong sense of community, rich with various practices, attitudes, and values. Relationships will be key. Before a Hindu person will even contemplate another way to believe, they will need a relationship with the person or people inviting them to consider Jesus. Sharing meals, enjoying activities, and spending significant time will go a long way in building trust and understanding between Christians and Hindus. Spending this time in relationship will also allow for a Christian to take on the posture of a learner, seeking to understand a Hindu way of life and particular beliefs and practices better. Asking good questions and showing respect for their customs will open doors for more meaningful conversations and bring insight into areas where gospel connections could be made. Sharing life together will also afford opportunities for Christians to demonstrate their own ways of life and belief. Within these

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Gen 3:15 (Adamic covenant); Gen 12:1-3 (Abrahamic); Ex 19-24 (Mosaic); 2 Sam 7:12-16 (Davidic).

<sup>56</sup> *Bhagavad-Gita* 18:56.

<sup>57</sup> “Jesus, the Vaishnavas, and the spirit of understanding,” *The Vaishnava Voice*.

<sup>58</sup> Jesus’s completed work includes crushing the power of Satan (Rom 16:20), conquering sin and death to give victory to those who trust in him (1 Cor 15:55-57).

relationships, a Christian should be intentional to identify and honor any points of agreement among Christian and Hindu lifestyles and beliefs. There will likely be shared values, perspectives, and even practices that will allow for mutual understanding and deeper conversations about the eternal realities that underlie these norms. A Christian should be shrewd in discerning common ground for the sake of pointing to true fulfillment found only in Jesus.

As there is opportunity for deeper spiritual discussions or even Bible study, particular focus should be given to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. When telling stories and reading passages of Scripture about Jesus's life and work, one should give attention to defining and discussing the concepts of sin and grace and looking at what the Bible reveals about Jesus's incarnation and atonement. These will likely be ongoing discussions over a long period of relationship, but prayerfully bearing much fruit. To be sure, Christians should commit to diligent prayer for their Hindu friends as they journey together spiritually and relationally. For as we plant seeds of gospel truth and water with relational commitment, we must remember that it is "only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:7).

### Conclusion

This article contrasted Hinduism, with a particular focus on Vaishnava belief and practice, as a religion of works and Christianity as a belief system of covenanted grace by referencing The Holy Bible, the ancient Christian creeds, and Hindu primary sources. By analyzing such sacred literature and dogma, it defined the Christian Jesus as the unique redeemer-king of humankind in contrast to the erroneous Hindu recognition of Jesus as but one manifestation of deity among many paths to salvation. This article concluded with practical recommendations for how to lead a Hindu adherent toward a right and saving belief in the true Jesus Christ.

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# The Importance of Eschatology<sup>1</sup>

JONATHAN MENN

Eschatology—the study of the “last things” or “end-times”—is important. It is important because approximately twenty-seven percent of the Bible contains prophetic or predictive elements.<sup>2</sup> Although not all prophecy relates to the end of history, lengthy and important passages in both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) concern the last things. Major OT prophets such as Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah wrote about eschatology. Jesus spoke at length concerning eschatology in the Olivet Discourse, and the apostles Peter, Paul, and John all wrote in some detail regarding eschatology. Consequently, not to have a good grasp of eschatology means that much of the Bible will remain closed, or be a mystery, to us.

However, eschatology can be contentious. Several different schools of eschatological thought have arisen during the course of Christian history. Eschatological views have proven to be the basis of major divisions among denominations and Christian traditions. Eschatology also is a great fascination for most people. Much has been written, and continues to be written, on the subject. Finally, many people seem to be of the opinion that one’s eschatological views have no practical importance. They are “pan-millennialists” who think that “everything will pan-out in the end.” That type of thinking, although probably not consciously articulated, may be behind the fact that most books on eschatology do not deal with the practical implications of one’s eschatological views. Such thinking, however, is contrary to the very nature of prophecy and apocalyptic prophecy such as the book of Revelation. All prophecy has an underlying moral or ethical purpose and is designed to confront and change people’s attitudes and behavior.

In this article, we will explore both the theological and practical importance of eschatology, since our theology—including our eschatology—should be coherent with how we live our lives. Indeed, our beliefs (including the hope and perspective that sound eschatology imparts) should motivate us to live lives worthy of Jesus Christ our Lord.

## THE THEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF ESCHATOLOGY

### Eschatology Helps to Integrate and Tie Together Our Overall Theology

The Bible tells a coherent, unfolding story from Genesis to Revelation. The biblical storyline has an inner unity, and Jesus Christ is at the heart of that story.<sup>3</sup> An important part of the biblical story is its consummation. Our eschatology exposes whether our theology as a whole is consistent or inconsistent with the rest of the biblical structure and story. Eschatology is important both for systematic theology (i.e., analyzing major Christian doctrines by themselves) and also for biblical theology (i.e., analyzing the overall, progressively-revealed, biblical storyline from beginning to end).

### Sound Eschatology Is a Source of Hope and Expectation

Most Christians, in most places, throughout most of history, have experienced hardship and persecution. That is still true today. Jesus and the apostles said that tribulation will characterize the entire time before the second coming.<sup>4</sup> In this vital area, sound eschatology is important.

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1 This article is adapted from chapter 12 of the author’s book, *Biblical Eschatology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018) (ISBN: 978-1-5326-4317-0).

2 J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 12–13.

3 Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; John 5:39–40, 46; Acts 3:18, 24; 10:43; 26:22–23; Rom 1:1–4; Heb 1:1–2; 1 Pet 1:10–12.

4 Matt 5:10–12; 24:6–9, 22, 29; Mark 13:7–9, 12, 20, 24; John 15:18–20; 16:33; Acts 11:19; 14:21–22; 20:23; Rom 5:3; 8:35–39; 12:12; 2 Cor 1:4, 8; 2:4; 4:8–11, 17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2; 12:10; Eph 3:13; Phil 4:14; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 1:6; 3:3, 7; 2 Thess 1:4, 6; 2 Tim 3:12; Heb 10:33; 1 Pet 4:12–16; Rev 1:9; 2:9–10.



The early disciples looked for the hope of the second coming. They did not expect to avoid suffering but knew they were being purified by suffering.<sup>5</sup> The early Christians could long for Christ's coming with a pure conscience, knowing that, as John Nolland observes, "everything that brings it closer must be a cause of encouragement. . . . Indeed as they themselves are caught up in the times of turmoil and distress, their reaction should be exactly the opposite to that which would be natural under such burdens: they should stand erect and raise their heads because their final deliverance draws near [Luke 21:28]."<sup>6</sup>

In fact, apocalyptic writings, such as the book of Revelation, Ezekiel, and the "synoptic apocalypse" (Matt 24:4–36; Mark 13:5–37; Luke 21:8–36) even exerted a significant influence in Christian art from the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages. In their study of apocalyptic themes in the monumental and minor art of early Christianity, John Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek found that, in their visions of paradise and the second coming, early Christian artists were very selective in their borrowings from apocalyptic texts. Such selectivity was purposeful:

Scenes of punishment and disaster were completely avoided. Biblical apocalyptic texts are terrifying and promise a dreadful fate to all but the most faithful and pure, but this frightening message is not what is communicated by apocalypses in early Christian art. The intention comes out explicitly in the inscriptions of mosaics at S. Pudenziana in Rome and the Monastery of the Stonecutters in Thessaloniki. The texts underline that God is there to be viewed, he is present in the building, and he brings salvation. The message could hardly be more comforting. Apparitions from threatening visions were used to illustrate prophecies of peace. Apocalyptic texts have been mined to extract material for images of a benevolent God in heaven and returning to earth. Apostles, saints, bishops, and churches are presented as parts of a system that mediates between heaven and earth and that offers safety, hope, and joy to the faithful individual. In the terrifying world of the late Roman Empire and the early Middle Ages, carefully crafted apocalyptic works of art were intended to provide the viewer with gratification and freedom from anxiety.<sup>7</sup>

As the work of these early artists attests, eschatology is not divorced from life. It is practical and can provide hope and comfort in ways that other means, including others aspects of theology, cannot.<sup>8</sup> Having a sound eschatology enables modern believers to have the same hope and expectation the early disciples had. This was demonstrated in the life of Christian martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer. While he was imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II, Bonhoeffer wrote that he found the books of Psalms and Revelation to be "unexpectedly helpful."<sup>9</sup> By contrast, he observed that his fellow prisoners who did not have a Christian worldview compartmentalized their lives and lapsed into superstition or fatalism in their attempts to deal with the stress of prison life and the fear engendered by air raids.<sup>10</sup>

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5 *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 4:3–5; *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2.2.6–8; 4.1.1–4.3.6; *The Didache*, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed., ed. and rev. Michael Holmes, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 16:1–8; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 110; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 5.25.1–26.1; 5.28.4; 5.30.4; 5.35.1; Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Coxe (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 22, 25, 27, 41.

6 John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, WBC 35C (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 1007.

7 John Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek, "Apocalyptic Themes in the Monumental and Minor Art of Early Christianity," in *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert Daly (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 80.

8 See Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 209–50.

9 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged ed., ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 128.

10 *Ibid.*, 231, 310–11.

## Sound Eschatology Strengthens the Teaching Ministry of the Church

Second Timothy 3:16–17 declares, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that God’s person may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”<sup>11</sup> Paul “did not shrink from declaring” “the whole purpose [or counsel] of God” (Acts 20:27). Not to have a well-thought-out eschatology that is consistent with the rest of our theology means that much of the Bible will remain a mystery. However, to be able to teach and preach from all sections of the Bible, including the eschatological parts, will help produce well-grounded, well-rounded, deeper Christians.

## Sound Eschatology Strengthens the Life of the Church

In many churches today, eschatology essentially is ignored. In other churches, and among various popular “prophecy experts,” eschatology is amazingly misunderstood and misused. James Edwards comments on the effects of this dual problem: “This unfortunate set of circumstances—both its abuse and its subsequent neglect—has weakened the church rather than strengthened it. If we dispense with eschatology, then the purpose and destiny of history fall into the hands of humanity alone. No one, I think, Christian or not, takes solace in that prospect. Unless human history, in all its greatness and potential as well as its propensity to evil and destructiveness, can be *redeemed*, human life is a futile and sordid endeavor.”<sup>12</sup>

Sound eschatology shows us that the kingdom already has been inaugurated but has not yet been consummated. Stanley Grenz explains that eschatology “asserts that history is meaningful because it is directed toward an end, a goal that lies at its conclusion and gives meaning to the whole.”<sup>13</sup> This understanding of history affects how Christians live and their attitude toward their lives: “The Christian has tasted the goodness of the eternal kingdom and even now participates in the reign of God. For this reason, the disciple is called to offer joyful obedience to the God of the future. At the same time, the church has not entered into the fullness of God’s universal rule. Therefore, the community of the faithful must avoid all triumphalism.”<sup>14</sup>

Sound eschatology helps us see our situation in true perspective: see our enemies in their true light; see our redeemer and king in his true glory; and see ourselves in our true beauty.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, eschatology helps Christians avoid despair when they see evil rampant in the world, helps Christians endure and remain faithful when they suffer and are tempted to compromise, and helps Christians bear witness to the gospel in any circumstance. Eschatology gives Christians the confidence that comes from a high view of God’s sovereignty, because they understand that God has declared “the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (Isa 46:10).<sup>16</sup> That enables Christians to live out their faith, act as God’s instruments to redeem people, and not allow things to remain as they are.

## THE PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF ESCHATOLOGY: ESCHATOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION

Despite the many great and wonderful things that exist in this world, everyone knows of the radical nature of evil in the world that corrupts everything, both material and immaterial. Rampant evil, corruption, and decay warp material things, social structures, relationships (among individuals,

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11 All Bible quotations are from the NASB. This quotation has been modified to read “God’s person” instead of “the man of God” since *anthrōpos* is gender neutral.

12 James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 402.

13 Stanley Grenz, *The Millennial Maze* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 200.

14 Ibid., 201.

15 Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 337–43.

16 As OT prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, God proved his word true. Just as he fulfilled his promises in the past, so God will fulfill his promises in the future. See Eckhard Schnabel, *40 Questions About the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 315.

groups, and with the environment), and warp each individual human heart. In other words, things are not the way they should be. James Edwards states, “The longing that things *ought not to be* as they are, and *cannot be allowed* to remain as they are, is essentially an eschatological longing.”<sup>17</sup> Eschatology (although perhaps unacknowledged), therefore, is the source or basis of discontent with existence as it is. But eschatology is more than that: it is the stimulus to act on our discontent to bring things more in line with God’s character and will. Christians are not merely to bemoan what is wrong with the world. Rather, because they have been given a new heart (Ezek 36:26), the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Rom 8:1–17), and the word of God,<sup>18</sup> they are now God’s agents of change in and for the world. Stephen Travis puts it like this:

If the coming of God’s rule in Jesus’s ministry meant fighting disease and bondage to evil, working against divisions in society and commercial exploitation, his followers are not at liberty to abandon such demands in preference for something else. We are certainly not free to concentrate on “spiritual” concerns to the neglect of what Jesus called “the weightier matters of the law”—justice, mercy and honesty (Matthew 23:23). . . . [On the other hand,] the winning of people to Christian discipleship must never be made subservient to the search for a better society. . . . In the quest for a better society the need for better people, transformed by the grace of Christ, is paramount. . . . We dare not give people only “the food that spoils”, essential though that is. We must lead them also to “the food that lasts for eternal life”, the real and “living bread which came down from heaven” (John 6:27, 51).<sup>19</sup>

The hope that our eschatology brings necessarily translates into practical involvement with the world, in other words, dealing with poverty, injustice, and bad social conditions. That demonstrates the reality of our faith which, in turn, facilitates evangelism.<sup>20</sup> James Boice reports, “Lord Shaftesbury, the great English social reformer and mature Christian, said near the end of his life, ‘I do not think that in the last forty years I have ever lived one conscious hour that was not influenced by the thought of our Lord’s return.’ In this case, the expectation of meeting the Lord face to face was one of the strongest motivations behind his social programs.”<sup>21</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx perceptively adds:

Christian faith in a post-terrestrial future can only be seen to be true if this eschatological hope shows itself capable of bringing mankind a better future here and now. Who could believe in a God who will make everything new “later” if it is in no way apparent from the activity of those who hope in the One who is to come that he is already beginning to make everything new *now*—if in fact it is not apparent that this eschatological hope is able *now* to change the course of history for the better? . . . It will have to be clear from the concrete practice of Christian life that God [in fact] manifests himself as the one whose power can bring about the new future.<sup>22</sup>

### The Power of Eschatological Rhetoric as a Motivator for Social Change

All cultures endeavor to mold their subjects into their own image. On the other hand, eschatology, particularly a book like Revelation, “offers a different way of perceiving the world which leads people to resist and to challenge the effects of the dominant ideology.”<sup>23</sup> This

17 Edwards, *Mark*, 402.

18 Luke 8:11, 15, 21; John 8:31; 17:14; Acts 4:29–31; Rom 15:18; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Heb 4:12; Jas 1:22.

19 Travis, *I Believe*, 236, 245.

20 See Joel Green, *How to Read Prophecy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 131–34.

21 James Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 456.

22 Edward Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 183–84.

23 Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 159. Elsewhere Bauckham states, “Those who imagine early Christianity as a quietist and apolitical movement should study the book of Revelation.” Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (London: SPCK, 1989), 101.

alternative vision of the world is strongly theocentric—indeed, Christ-centered. Richard Bauckham states, “In the end it is only a purified vision of the transcendence of God that can effectively resist the human tendency to idolatry which consists in absolutizing aspects of this world. The worship of the true God is the power of resistance to the deification of military and political power (the beast) and economic prosperity (Babylon).”<sup>24</sup> Such a platform provides the basis to confront oppression, injustice, and inhumanity. As Theodore Stylianopoulos contends, “Revelation is above all a call for justice, a cry for the kingdom, a prayer for the disclosure of God’s rule on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Revelation provides the basis for us to critique the church itself which, far too often in history, has demonstrated that it has “left its first love” (Rev 2:4) and attached itself to supporting the state, the dominant culture, and the world.<sup>26</sup> In these ways, the book of Revelation specifically and eschatology in general confront us with the fundamental issues: Where do my primary loyalties lie and who is my true Lord? Our responses to our own culture and to the world’s ideologies and influences demonstrate our answers to those questions.

Response to Revelation’s “call for justice” and “cry for the kingdom” frequently has come from the oppressed and the disadvantaged. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza observes, “Oppressed and disadvantaged Christians read Revelation contextually as political-religious typology that speaks to their own situation. Latin American or South African liberation theologies cherish Revelation’s political world of vision for its prophetic indictment of exploitation and oppression as well as its sustaining vision of justice.”<sup>27</sup> An example of this is the insurrection led by John Chilembwe in January 1915 in Nyasaland (modern Malawi) against the British colonial authorities’ injustices and exploitation of the colonial system. Chilembwe himself was a Baptist minister. Philip Jenkins writes, “Almost certainly he was drawing heavily on Baptist apocalyptic ideas.”<sup>28</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza gives three notable examples of such a perspective and witness drawn from the eschatology of Revelation: “In his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, Martin Luther King, Jr., echoes the language and images of Revelation when interpreting experiences and hopes in the struggle for the civil rights of African-Americans; Allan Boesak’s commentary *Comfort and Protest* contextualizes Revelation in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa; and Daniel Berrigan penned his reflection on Revelation, *Nightmare of God*, while imprisoned for his activities in support of anti-nuclear-war protests.”<sup>29</sup>

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24 Bauckham, *Theology*, 160. In this regard, T. Desmond Alexander, in commenting on the rivalry between the USSR and the USA in the latter half of the twentieth century, observes that “in resisting communism Christians may have been deceived into thinking that capitalism is the church’s ally. Yet, if we want to identify the greatest enemy of the Christian faith, we must look closely at Babylon and observe its obsession with consumerism. There is nothing that stands more effectively as a barrier to people knowing God than the desire for wealth that comes through capitalism.” T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity, 2008), 183.

25 Theodore Stylianopoulos, “I Know Your Works: Grace and Judgment in the Apocalypse,” in *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert Daly (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 28.

26 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out, “Whereas mainline Christianity has often co-opted or neutralized Revelation’s political-religious language and vision by identifying God’s empire with the institutional church or with the interior salvation of the soul, messianic-prophetic Christian movements have again and again affirmed Revelation’s visions of salvation as a vision of total well-being and freedom from oppression. They have read it as promising liberation from oppressive ecclesiastical structures and from the destructive domination of those who have power in the world.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: A Vision of a Just World*, PC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 128.

27 Ibid., 7.

28 Philip Jenkins, “Chilembwe’s rising,” *Christian Century* (February 18, 2015): 45. The revolt was crushed but “left behind a legacy of nationalist and Africanist sentiment. Chilembwe today is Malawi’s greatest national hero. His face appears on Malawi’s currency, and every January 15 the nation celebrates John Chilembwe Day.” Ibid.

29 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 11. This is not to say that only those who oppose the state, the successful, the wealthy, and the powerful, necessarily are correct. Tremendous amounts of unspeakable evil have been done in the name of opposing the successful, the wealthy, the powerful, and the privileged—witness, for example, the French Revolution and every communist revolution. The issues are one’s motivation and who is one’s real Lord: Jesus, or someone or something else?

Throughout history, eschatological language, images, and ideas often have proven to be powerful tools for analyzing contemporary events and motivating action. With respect to the concept of Antichrist, for example, in the fifteenth century, Antichrist rhetoric “functioned as an integral part of a broad apocalyptic appeal” by radical Hussites to galvanize peasants and some city dwellers to overthrow the existing social and religious order.<sup>30</sup> During the Reformation, eschatological and apocalyptic themes often were employed. One important early pamphleteer was Heinrich von Kettenbach. Steven Ozment states, “Kettenbach drew no fewer than forty-nine contrasts between the ‘anti-Christlike’ behavior of the pope and the biblical ministry of Jesus—perhaps the most popular tactic of early Protestant propaganda, both pictorial and written. In heated apocalyptic language, he urged pious German knights to take up arms against chapters, cloisters, and abbacies, all ‘plunderers of the bodies, souls, honor, and goods’ of kings and noblemen.”<sup>31</sup> The same was true during the Peasants’ Revolt in Germany during the sixteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Antichrist rhetoric also exploded during the English Civil War of the seventeenth century.<sup>33</sup>

Apart from Antichrist rhetoric, eschatological language and motifs have proven to be important in other ways, particularly in times of crisis and social change. For example, in American history, Roger Williams founded the state of Rhode Island and was a pioneer of religious toleration and rights for native Americans. Bernard McGinn notes that “it is often forgotten that he arrived at these forward-looking views on the basis of a deeply apocalyptic theology of history.”<sup>34</sup> America’s first-generation Puritan ministers such as John Cotton expounded the book of Revelation and tied it to the mission of the colonists in New England to “add incentive and urgency to New England’s special mission.”<sup>35</sup> Harry Stout observes that “millennial speculations and predictions also played a supporting role in arousing public support for war [the French and Indian War of 1754–1763].”<sup>36</sup> Stout adds that, with the onset of the American Revolution in 1775, millennial rhetoric “played a vital role in affirming that the struggle was more than a constitutional dispute; it was part of a foreordained plan to establish a new order for the ages that would prefigure, in civil and religious forms, the shape God’s millennial kingdom would eventually assume in the fullness of time.”<sup>37</sup>

Again, in the American Civil War (1861–1865), most Northern clergy viewed the war in apocalyptic terms, as God’s instrument for ushering in the millennium.<sup>38</sup> African Americans in particular “expressed concrete millennial hopes for the war. The Day of Jubilee seemed so dramatic an expectation that blacks developed premillennial visions, seeing their freedom perhaps as the beginning of a new kingdom brought on in an awful conflagration.”<sup>39</sup>

30 Bernard McGinn, *Anti-Christ: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 185–87.

31 Steven Ozment, *Protestants: The Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 48.

32 McGinn, *Anti-Christ*, 213–17.

33 Ibid., 225. Charles Reagan Wilson adds, “By the late 1640s, more extreme millennial sectarians, such as the Fifth Monarchists, shocked mainstream Protestant reformers by calling Presbyterianism—of all things—the Beast of Revelation. Each event of the Civil War promoted more extreme language, moving well beyond the desires of middle-class reformers.” Charles Reagan Wilson, “Religion and the American Civil War in Comparative Perspective,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, eds. Randall Miller, Harry Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 398.

34 McGinn, *Anti-Christ*, 239.

35 Stout, *The New England Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 48–49.

36 Ibid., 246.

37 Ibid., 307.

38 David Chesebrough, *God Ordained This War: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 88–89; Wilson, “American Civil War,” 399.

39 Wilson, “American Civil War,” 399. Even the South saw the war in millennialistic terms, although the Southern version (at least the *white* Southern version, not that of the slaves) allowed for the slavery in the looked-for millennium. Chesebrough, *God Ordained This War*, 226–27. Paul Harvey adds, “Southern Christians, faced with the overwhelming fact of racial slavery, were less enthusiastic about millennial visions of an American society cleansed of sin. Southern evangelicalism was oriented to the private, to reforming individual behavior rather than assuming the critic of the social order.” Paul Harvey, “‘Yankee Faith’ and Southern Redemption: White Southern Baptist Ministers, 1850-1890,” in *Religion*



Perhaps America's most popular song of that era, and most important battle song, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" by Julia Ward Howe, first published in 1862, is saturated with Scripture and eschatology. The first stanza goes:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:  
His truth is marching on.

The first line is based on Christ's statements in the Olivet Discourse concerning the second coming. "Trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored" is based on Revelation 14:18–20; 19:15, and the apocalyptic text of Isaiah 63:3. The "fateful lightning" derives from the lightning that emanates from the throne of God that accompanies the *parousia*.<sup>40</sup> His "terrible swift sword" draws on Revelation 19:15 and Isaiah 27:1.

Thus, apocalyptic imagery is powerful visually, in writing, and when set to music. It moves people. Eschatology has been employed in support of good causes and bad. It has been the stimulus to fight against oppression (e.g., John Chilembwe, Martin Luther King, Jr., the struggle against apartheid). It has helped to motivate social reform (e.g., Lord Shaftesbury, Roger Williams). Yet apocalyptic imagery and rhetoric can also unleash forces that take on a life of their own which may lead to unforeseen and not entirely Christ-honoring consequences (e.g., wars stemming from the Reformation, the wars in colonial North America, and the American Civil War). This should cause those using eschatological language, themes, and images to reflect on why and how they are using them, since eschatology is an important part of the word of God.

#### THE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF DIFFERENT ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEWS

"Most human beings act from a complex tangle of motives, impulses, and values; absolute consistency is rare," explains Paul Boyer.<sup>41</sup> A person's view of eschatology is *one* influence on what someone thinks, how they view the world, and, consequently, on the way he or she acts. Of course, other theological, secular, political, economic, relational, and personal factors motivate people to act in different ways. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that eschatology is important. Stephen Travis mentions the logic of eschatology vis-à-vis social change: "To regard the kingdom as wholly future or a wholly other-worldly phenomenon normally leads to a conservative attitude towards social change, and to a narrow view of the church's mission in terms of rescuing individuals out of a fallen world. By contrast, those who stress that the kingdom of God is already at work in the world are likely to argue for radical social change and for a view of mission which refuses to limit its scope to the spiritual deliverance of individuals out of the world into the safety of the church."<sup>42</sup> In fact, there are clear historical correlations between Christians' eschatological views and how they live their lives, particularly with respect to social action.

#### Eschatology and Christian Social Action: Postmillennialism

##### 1. The Basic Outlook of Postmillennialism toward History and Humanity's Future

Postmillennialism is the belief that the "millennium" is a future, discrete period of unprecedented Christian influence in the world (a "golden age"), based on the work of the

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*and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall Miller et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 170. That is not to deprecate the southerners as devils. Lincoln perceptively and charitably stated in his speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act, "They are just what we would be in their situation." Abraham Lincoln, *Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858* (New York: The Library of America, 1989), 315. However, this example highlights the fact that people can and do use eschatological language (and Scripture in general) to advance their own agendas, not God's.

40 Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18.

41 Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1992), 302.

42 Travis, *I Believe*, 49–50.

church and the Holy Spirit in the world, that gradually emerges before Christ's return. Christ will then come again, receive the kingdom, and initiate the eternal state.<sup>43</sup> Wayne Grudem summarizes postmillennialism's basic outlook on history as follows: "The primary characteristic of postmillennialism is that it is very optimistic about the power of the gospel to change lives and bring about much good in the world."<sup>44</sup> Today, most partial preterists<sup>45</sup> are postmillennial in their eschatology and thus share the same essentially optimistic philosophy of history.<sup>46</sup>

## 2. Historical Trends: Social Engagement; a Focus on This World; the Rise of the "Social Gospel"

Partial preterist and postmillennialist Kenneth Gentry states that the eschatological theme of the victory of the gospel "is most influential in promoting a full-orbed Christian witness and Bible-based social activism."<sup>47</sup> As a result of postmillennialism's essentially optimistic view of the divine power of the Spirit now at work through the church, Stanley Grenz concludes:

Postmillennialists tend to focus their attention on the present situation, finding in it only a few, albeit challenging, impediments to the full realization of the blessed society. And they are hopeful that the soon overcoming of these remaining problems might just mark the dawning of the reign of God. At its best, then, the postmillennial world view leads to engagement in the world. . . . It is no historical accident that by and large the great thrusts toward worldwide evangelistic outreach and social concern in the modern era were launched by a church imbued with the optimism that characterizes postmillennial thinking.<sup>48</sup>

For example, the Puritans were mostly postmillennialists. Their eschatology affected their attitude toward their mission as they left Europe and settled in the "New World." Avihu Zakai explains that the Puritans "believed themselves sent by God's divine providence into exile in America to establish Christ's Kingdom upon the stage of the world. This divine plan would eventually transform the world into the Kingdom of God. They confidently expected their own rigorous adherence to God's Word would lead to the millennial rule of Christ, and, consequently, to the establishment in New England of the utopian New Jerusalem described in the Book of Revelation."<sup>49</sup>

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43 Loraine Boettner, "Postmillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 117–41. Postmillennialist Greg Bahnsen states that "it is more common today for postmillennialists to refer to the whole period, from the first advent to the second, as the millennium," but they contend that "Christianity will become the dominant principle rather than the exception to the rule." Greg Bahnsen, *Victory in Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media, 2015), 34, 92; see also J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 17.

44 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 1111; see also Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 184.

45 Partial preterism holds that most biblical prophecy has been fulfilled with the first coming of Christ and the destruction of the temple in AD 70. It holds that Christ's ascension and enthronement in heaven represents his *parousia*, which led to his coming (*parousia*) in judgment against Israel in AD 70. David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion, 1987), 434–35; Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), 157–69. Nevertheless, partial preterists agree that the "second advent" of Christ will occur at the end of history, accompanied by resurrection, judgment, and the institution of the final state. R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 157; Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), 276–77; Chilton, *Vengeance*, 494, 589; Kik, *Eschatology*, 158. Full preterism, on the other hand, holds that *all* biblical prophecy has been fulfilled. Full preterists see "the second advent (including the 'rapture,' resurrection, and judgment) as occurring in A.D. 70." Gentry, *Dominion*, 271; see also Don Preston, *Like Father, Like Son, On Clouds of Glory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2010), 200; Sproul, *Last Days*, 157. Full preterism does not share postmillennialism's essential optimism since it "empties the New Testament of hope for the modern believer. If the rapture of the living saints, the resurrection of the dead saints, the coming of Christ are already past realities, if all prophecy is really fulfilled, then upon what do we base our hope for the future?" Waldron, "Preterism," in *Lecture Notes on Eschatology* (Online: 2000), n.p.

46 C. Marvin Pate, "Introduction to Revelation," in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 23.

47 Gentry, *Dominion*, 16.

48 Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 185.

49 Avihu Zakai, "Theocracy in Massachusetts: The Puritan Universe of Sacred Imagination." *Studies in the Literary*



Eschatological thinking continued to exert its influence in America long after the Puritans were gone. Grenz states, “Perhaps nowhere was this American Christian utopianism speaking the language of the Apocalypse more pronounced than in the antislavery movement. . . .When victory came, postmillennial optimism anticipated a new day for the nation. . . .But the victory over slavery did not result in the millennial era. Other evils remained in the land. As a result, the postmillennial spirit with its visions of a Christianized society fostered other reformist movements—women’s suffrage, temperance and even the social gospel.”<sup>50</sup>

Postmillennialism tends to stress the continuity between the things of this age and the millennium. The tendency of postmillennialists to identify with contemporary society augmented the rise of theological liberalism and the more secular orientation of the social gospel movement. Proponents of the social gospel felt that “social transformation rather than individual conversions [was] considered the sign of the kingdom.”<sup>51</sup> By Christianizing the social order and economic structure, the hope was that discrimination, injustice, and war would wither away. Those hopes were largely overturned by World Wars I and II, and postmillennialism declined, although it has staged something of a comeback in recent years in the liberation theology from the left side of the political spectrum and Christian reconstructionism from the right.

Paul Boyer notes a distinction between postmillennialists of the latter nineteenth and the latter twentieth centuries: “While postmillennialists of an earlier day had focused on issues of social justice, the Reconstructionists were more interested in imposing their own (they saw it as Christ’s) stern morality on the world.”<sup>52</sup> Boyer’s observation concerning the liberal emphasis on social justice and the conservative emphasis on individual morality is interesting and astute. That phenomenon is not limited to postmillennialists. The dichotomy between the emphasis on social justice and individual moral behavior indicates that *both* sides of the divide have truncated theologies. The Bible has much to say about social justice *and* morality. This issue obviously transcends eschatology. But the historical correlation between eschatological views and an emphasis or de-emphasis of various social, political, and moral positions suggests the importance of eschatology as an influence on one’s overall social-political-moral worldview.<sup>53</sup>

### 3. Environmentalism

Postmillennialist David Chilton states that when God created Adam, “He placed him into a *land*, and gave him dominion over it. Land is basic to dominion; therefore, salvation involves a restoration to land and property.”<sup>54</sup> He adds, “God saves His people *in* their environment, not *out* of it; *and He saves the environment*.”<sup>55</sup> Janel Curry-Roper has done a study of the relationship between eschatological views and one’s attitude toward the environment. She found that postmillennialist statements like these “seem to encourage a strong land ethic.”<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, at least with respect to modern *reconstructionist* postmillennialists, she offers this caveat: “Their land ethic, however, seems closely, if woodenly, strapped to Old Testament law as represented in the Hebrew Scriptures. . . . This limitation keeps these postmillennialists from a full and mature elaboration of a viable land ethic,” particularly given “reconstructionist support of individualistic free-market capitalism, which becomes the overriding belief system that thoroughly conditions their

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*Imagination* 27 (Online: 1994): 23.

<sup>50</sup> Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 58.

<sup>51</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1214; see also Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 185–86, 188.

<sup>52</sup> Boyer, *When Time*, 303.

<sup>53</sup> One could, of course, also argue the reverse, i.e., that one’s pre-existing social-political-moral worldview is shaping or coloring one’s eschatology. At minimum, we must be aware of the clear correlation between the two.

<sup>54</sup> David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Dominion, 1985), 49.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>56</sup> Janel Curry-Roper, “Contemporary Christian Eschatologies and Their Relation to Environmental Stewardship,” *Professional Geographer* 42 (1990): 164.

land ethic.”<sup>57</sup> This highlights the point made earlier about the correlation and interaction between one’s eschatology and one’s pre-existing social and political views.<sup>58</sup>

### Eschatology and Christian Social Action: Premillennialism

#### 1. The Basic Outlook of Premillennialism (especially Dispensational Premillennialism) toward History and Humanity’s Future

Premillennialism is any belief that Christ will come *before* the “thousand years.” Premillennialists believe that at his coming Christ will institute a thousand-year reign (“golden age”) on the earth, after which he will institute the eternal state. Premillennialists are divided into two main camps: historic premillennialists and dispensational premillennialists.<sup>59</sup> Historic premillennialists believe that any doctrine of the millennium must be based on the NT and be consistent with Christ’s present reign. They believe that there will be two bodily resurrections separated by the “thousand years”: the resurrection of the righteous when Christ comes again and then the resurrection of the unrighteous after the thousand years. After that, the eternal state will be instituted.<sup>60</sup> Dispensational premillennialists hold that there is a radical distinction between Israel and the church and prophetic promises to OT Israel must literally be fulfilled in the physical nation of Israel, not in the church. They hold that Christ will actually have two “second comings”: the first one (the “rapture”) is only “for” the church (i.e., the church will leave the earth and meet Christ in the air and then go back with him to heaven); later, after the “great tribulation,” Christ will physically come with his church to the earth and set up a thousand-year kingdom in which Israel is dominant.<sup>61</sup> After that there will be a great rebellion which Christ will overcome. He will then institute the eternal state.

Premillennialism, especially dispensational premillennialism, displays a basically pessimistic view concerning history and our role in its culmination.<sup>62</sup> In other words, all the efforts of Christians in the world will not lead to the reformation of society. The kingdom will not come gradually through the church but will be inaugurated by the cataclysmic event of the second coming. Nevertheless, many astute premillennialists have written concerning engagement with the world. Noted historic premillennialist OT professor Walter Kaiser has said that “the object of faith in the Old Testament was basically the same as that of the New Testament!”<sup>63</sup> In his *Toward Old Testament Ethics* he writes that, in the OT (and therefore also in the NT) “holiness lays claim to the entirety of a person’s life,” including one’s worship, work, family, and society (including social justice and how one uses one’s wealth).<sup>64</sup> Politically active dispensational premillennialists Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson discuss social activism as follows: “Just as there are many passages that describe the end times, there are scores of passages that outline Christian responsibilities in this world. We take both sets of passages seriously. The Bible says that we should be ready for the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> See n.53, above, and associated text.

<sup>59</sup> There are other variants among premillennialists such as J. Webb Mealy’s “new creation millennialism,” and dispensationalists have their own variants such as progressive dispensationalism and differences between those who believe in a pretribulational, midtribulational, or prewrath rapture. These views are all discussed in Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

<sup>60</sup> Ladd, “Historic Premillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 17–40.

<sup>61</sup> Alan Patrick Boyd, “A Dispensational Premillennial Analysis of the Eschatology of the Post-Apostolic Fathers (Until the Death of Justin Martyr)” (Master’s thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977), 4–13; Hoyt, “Dispensational Premillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 63–92.

<sup>62</sup> Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 185.

<sup>63</sup> Walter Kaiser, “The Law as God’s Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Wayne Strickland, 177–203 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 183.

<sup>64</sup> Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 139. Kaiser unpacks the implications of the above quotation in chapters 9–15.

second coming and that we should be good citizens—the salt of the earth. We do not view those missions as contradictory or mutually exclusive. We will work to better the world because the Bible tells us to, and we will await Christ’s return because the Scripture says it will happen.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Professor John Frame observes, “The movement in the 1970s and ’80s toward greater Christian involvement in social issues was spearheaded, not by Reformed amils and postmils, but by Arminian [dispensationalist] premils like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson.”<sup>66</sup>

## 2. Historical Trends: Dispensationalist Social Disengagement

Despite the movement toward greater Christian political involvement beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, Dobson and Hindson’s statements reveal a profound dualism concerning the relationship between dispensationalist eschatology and social action. They see “two sets” of biblical passages—one on eschatology and one on how to live—but the former has nothing to do with the latter. Prior to the 1970s and 1980s, this in fact led to social activism being downplayed within dispensational premillennial circles. Indeed, “from John Darby’s [dispensationalism’s originator in the 1830s] day on, a vast body of premillennialist writing warned against the lure of social activism. . . . Through the Depression and World War II, prophecy writers emphasized the uselessness of human efforts at social betterment: regardless of what governments and uplift organizations might do, war, suffering, and conflict were bound to grow worse.”<sup>67</sup> For example, Richard Lovelace recounts that one factor in the breakup of evangelical social concern was “a monolithic shift in eschatology which occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Up to this point premillennial, postmillennial and amillennial evangelicals had been united in working and praying toward spiritual, cultural and social renewal. . . . The whole momentum of Dispensational theology moved toward a form of premillennialism which was evangelistically active but socially passive.”<sup>68</sup>

Evangelistic activity but social passivity is particularly acute when people think that the church is going to be raptured within a few years. This was demonstrated by the Jesus People Movement of the 1960s–1970s, in which many thousands of young people came to faith in Christ. David Di Sabatino did a major study of that movement. One of his findings was:

Most Jesus People believed that the “rapture” (which would snatch all the Christian believers up to heaven before the end of the world) would occur within their lifetime. . . . Since the last days were quickly approaching, a sense of urgency towards the fate of those still unevangelized developed. Street-corner witnessing efforts were girded by a “turn or burn” mentality. Those that did not accept their message of hope through Jesus Christ were forthrightly told that their choice would exclude them from the “rapture of the church,” that they would be damned to hell. . . . [Because of their eschatology] the Jesus People did not readily embrace social amelioration as one of their dominant themes.<sup>69</sup>

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65 Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, “Apocalypse Now? What Fundamentalists Believe About the End of the World,” *Policy Review* 38 (1986): 21. Similarly, moderate dispensationalist Billy Graham said, “We must do what we can, even though we know that God’s ultimate plan is the making of a new earth and a new heaven.” Billy Graham, *Approaching Hoofbeats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 196.

66 John Frame, “Ethics and the Millennium” (Online: May 17, 2012), n.p.

67 Boyer, *When Time*, 298.

68 Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 376–77; see also Al Truesdale, “Last Things First: The Impact of Eschatology on Ecology,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 46 (1994): 117–18; Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875–1982*, enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 215–16; Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 131; Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 126–28.

69 David Di Sabatino, “The Jesus People Movement: Countercultural Revival and Evangelical Renewal” (Master’s thesis, McMaster University, 1994), 140–42.

This is diametrically opposed to the spirit of Jesus, who “makes helping one’s neighbor the criterion for one’s entrance into the kingdom of God (Mt 25:31–46; compare Luke 10:25–41; 16:19–31).”<sup>70</sup> Not all dispensational premillennialists, of course, are disengaged from society (as we have noted above). Individual dispensationalists may be as active in the social realm as postmillennialists, amillennialists, and historic premillennialists. But if they are so engaged, it may be *in spite* of their eschatology rather than *because* of it.<sup>71</sup>

### 3. Environmentalism

One example of this social disengagement is the environment. In her study of eschatology and the environment, Curry-Roper found:

Dispensationalism maintains that the present general direction of history is toward societal and ecological deterioration. The only hope for societal structures is the return of Christ. . . . Little can be done at present. Satan has the upper hand and humankind can only hope and pray for the end to come. . . . Dispensationalism uses information on environmental pollution, concern over the environmental impact of nuclear weapons, and so on, to show how prophecy is being fulfilled, and thus it fosters no active, stewardly response—only idle waiting. Furthermore, dispensational premillennialism is not itself a motivating force for action; rather it has to be purposely set aside in order to justify ecologically responsible action. What, then, is the meaning of Christ’s return for the natural world in dispensationalism? The earth seems to have no place in the future—heaven is sought after, not earth. The earth is not a significant part of the redemption plan that began with Christ’s resurrection. No theology of the earth exists in contemporary dispensational premillennial thought. The earth is destroyed or perhaps inherited by Jews while Christians inherit heaven. . . . Since heaven, not the earth, is to be inherited by believers upon Christ’s return, the present natural world is of little theological consequence.<sup>72</sup>

In his article concerning the impact of eschatology on ecology, professor Al Truesdale writes, “It is logically impossible and morally contradictory both to embrace this creation as inviolable and at the same time reject it as hopelessly doomed and excluded from God’s future. . . . Until evangelicals purge from their vision of the Christian faith the wine of pessimistic dispensationalist premillennialism, the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation and the biblical image of stewardship will be orphans in their midst. These doctrines will be unable to yield their rich potential for environmental ethics.”<sup>73</sup>

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70 B. J. Oropeza, *99 Reasons Why No One Knows When Christ Will Return* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 174; see also Jas 2:15–17.

71 That, in fact, proved to be the case with respect to the increased political involvement spearheaded by leading dispensationalists in the 1970s and 1980s. Timothy Weber analyzed the bases of Hal Lindsey’s and Jerry Falwell’s political prescriptions in relation to their eschatology and arrived at essentially the same conclusion for both of them: Lindsey “never demonstrates how his diagnosis of and prescription for American political and social life has anything to do with biblical prophecy. His observations and remedies come out of right-wing political ideology and have nothing to do with premillennialism per se. . . . Though his premillennialism led him in one direction, his political commitments led him in another.” Weber, *Living in the Shadow*, 219–20. Likewise, “Falwell is not going against his premillennialist principles. He is merely setting them aside or keeping them separate from his politics, where other values and commitments take precedence.” *Ibid.*, 221.

72 Curry-Roper, “Contemporary Christian Eschatologies,” 161–63, 166–67. Guth, Green, Kellstedt, and Smidt, in their analysis of several surveys of clergy, religious activists, political party contributors, and the general public, arrived at similar conclusions. They found that, overall, “conservative [i.e., dispensationalist premillennial] eschatology remains a powerful influence in virtually all samples,” and “the complex of ideas in dispensational theology—and not just Biblical literalism—may well condition fundamentalists, Pentecostals, and other evangelicals against active concern with environmental policies.” James Guth et al., “Faith and the Environment: Religious Belief and Attitudes on Environmental Policy,” *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (1995): 374, 377.

73 Al Truesdale, “Last Things First,” 118.

On the other hand, R. S. Beal Jr. (a premillennialist) argues that premillennialism is consistent with environmentalism. Beal bases his claim that premillennialists exhibit environmental concern on three grounds: (1) Because God places great value on his creation, Christians should also; (2) The rule of life for Christians is “the principle of totally unselfish, wholly giving love”; and (3) “At the return of Christ the earth will be renovated, restored, brought into a new and greater splendor” but will not be burned up or destroyed.<sup>74</sup> Beal’s arguments are consistent with Curry-Roper’s conclusion that that “amillennialism and *historic* premillennialism have been the most productive of these three main traditions in writings about the environment and mankind’s relationship to it.”<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the most important early evangelical response to the environmental crisis was Francis Schaeffer’s *Pollution and the Death of Man*, published in 1970. Schaeffer was an historic premillennialist.<sup>76</sup>

## Eschatology and Christian Social Action: Amillennialism

### 1. The Basic Outlook of Amillennialism toward History and Humanity’s Future

Between postmillennial optimism and premillennial pessimism lies amillennialism. Amillennialists believe that the “thousand years” is a symbolic reference to the entire period between Christ’s resurrection until shortly before his return. That period will be characterized by the spread of the gospel but also by the spread of sin. Christ’s return will result in the general resurrection and judgment, and will usher in the eternal state.<sup>77</sup> Grenz summarizes what he terms the “realistic” outlook of amillennial eschatology:

No golden age will come to humankind on earth, except perhaps as the partial triumph now enjoyed by the church in the midst of tribulation. . . . The result is a world view characterized by realism. Victory and defeat, success and failure, good and evil will coexist until the end, amillennialism asserts. . . . Both unchastened optimism and despairing pessimism are illegitimate, amillennialism declares. The amillennialist world view calls the church to “realistic activity” in the world. Under the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit the church will be successful in its mandate (postmillennialism); yet ultimate success will come only through God’s grace (premillennialism). The kingdom of God arrives as the divine action breaking into the world (premillennialism); yet human cooperation brings important, albeit penultimate, results (postmillennialism). Therefore, the people of God must expect great things in the present; but knowing that the kingdom will never arrive in its fullness in history, they must always remain realistic in their expectations.<sup>78</sup>

### 2. Historical Trends: Building the Kingdom One-Step-at-a-Time

Historically, most mainstream denominations have been essentially amillennial in their eschatology. Much of the work of founding schools, hospitals, and social service agencies has been carried out under their (and, as discussed above, postmillennialist) auspices. By its very nature,

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<sup>74</sup> R. S. Beal, Jr., “Can a Premillennialist Consistently Entertain A Concern for the Environment? A Rejoinder to Al Truesdale,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 46 (1994): 172–77. Beal’s first two arguments are not drawn from eschatology but from other biblical commands or concerns (see the discussion of “dispensational dualism,” above). His third argument is based on eschatology but not an eschatology unique to the *dispensational* view of the destruction/renewal of the earth. Thus, while he provides reasons for *historic* premillennialists to demonstrate concern for the environment, Beal does not actually answer Truesdale’s contention that *dispensational* premillennialism is inconsistent with environmentalism.

<sup>75</sup> Curry-Roper, “Contemporary Christian Eschatologies,” 164, *emph. added* to distinguish *historic* from *dispensational* premillennialism.

<sup>76</sup> In an article concerning eschatology, social justice, reconstructionism (a/k/a dominionism), and culture, one writer adds that Schaeffer was “himself a Premillennialist but influenced by some of the ideas of Postmillennial dominionism.” Libby Anne, “The End Times, Part II: Social Justice, Dominionism, and the Culture Wars” (Online: February 12, 2012), n.p.

<sup>77</sup> Anthony Hoekema, “Amillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 155–87.

<sup>78</sup> Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 186–87.

amillennial eschatology tends to avoid the excesses of over-identification with or absorption by the world to which some postmillennialists are prone and the withdrawal from the world to which some dispensational premillennialists are prone. The amillennialist attitude is well-captured by the following historical example: “At the meeting of the Connecticut Assembly in 1780 there was a sense of approaching judgment, of the world coming to an end. Outside, there was a threatening roll of thunder. The Speaker said, ‘Either this is the end of the world or it is not. If it is not, we should proceed with the business. If it is, I prefer to be found doing my duty.’”<sup>79</sup>

### 3. Environmentalism

In her study of Christian eschatologies and environmentalism, Curry-Roper joined amillennialism together with historic (not dispensational) premillennialism “because they are very similar in their hermeneutic, view of prophecy, view of the kingdom of God, and thus expectations of the future.”<sup>80</sup> According to her analysis, the amillennial view (which, together with historic premillennialism, was most productive in writings about the environment) may be summarized as follows regarding social action and environmentalism:

With the aid of the Holy Spirit, Satan can be beaten back—evidence of the power of God in this age—but he cannot be totally subdued until the return of Christ. . . . This faith in Christ’s return motivates amillennialists and historic premillennialists to work towards healing in areas affected by the fall—healing of the divisions between person and person, mankind and nature, and among organisms within the natural realm. It is a call to exhibit rightly dominion—to be an example of substantial healing to the world. . . . Nature is included in mankind’s call to heal because of God’s concern and power over all. . . . Christians are called to work at this restoration in order to give evidence of the future universal restoration of this very earth that will take place when Christ returns. In this way earth retains its geographic dimension yet has transcendental connotations also.<sup>81</sup>

#### Eschatology and Christian Social Action: Conclusion

In her study, “Contemporary Christian Eschatologies and Their Relation to Environmental Stewardship,” Janel Curry-Roper stated, “I believe that eschatology is the most ecologically decisive component of a theological system. It influences adherents’ actions and determines their views of mankind, their bodies, souls, and world-views.”<sup>82</sup> Both in the past and present, eschatological views have significantly affected believers’ strategies of social action (or social passivity). We need to be aware of these historical tendencies. Such awareness is particularly important if our own eschatological view inclines us either to withdraw from active engagement with the world and its problems or inclines us to overestimate our own ability and influence.

We also can draw on the insights and emphases of eschatological positions we reject. Stanley Grenz concludes:

The millennial views all have important points to make concerning this eschatological living [during the “already, but not yet” of the kingdom of God]. . . . The optimism of postmillennialism derives from two foundational truths. First, in the final analysis, God is sovereign over history and is actively engaged in bringing his sovereign goal to pass. . . . But second, this same God has invited us—through Christ has even *commissioned* us—to participate in the advance of the divine reign. . . . Premillennialism reminds

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79 Travis, *I Believe*, 219.

80 Curry-Roper, “Contemporary Christian Eschatologies,” 164.

81 Ibid., 164–65, 167. Truesdale gives a brief summary of the evangelical response to the environmental crisis in his article “Last Things First,” 117.

82 Curry-Roper, “Contemporary Christian Eschatologies,” 159.



us that ultimately it is God, and not our feeble actions, who is the hope of the world. Finally, amillennial realism lifts our sights above the merely historical future to the realm of the eternal God. It reminds us that the kingdom of God is a transcendent reality that can be confused with no earthly kingdom prior to the final transformation of creation. . . . Because of the cosmic dimensions of the vision of corporate eschatology, our ultimate goal is not a golden age on earth, whether preceding or following the return of Christ. Rather, we await with eager anticipation a glorious eternal reality, the new heaven and new earth.<sup>83</sup>

By understanding eschatology, we can have a well-integrated theology that enables us to live authentic Christian lives with confidence and hope. Such lives will demonstrate the present reality of the kingdom, while we look forward to the final consummation in all its glory.

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83 Grenz, *Millennial Maze*, 212–14. Similar conclusions were drawn by John Frame who said, “I agree with the amils and premils that this age is an age of suffering and persecution for God’s people. I also agree with the postmils that in the *long* run this age can be seen as an age of Christian triumph, not only in narrowly “spiritual” matters, but in the church’s social influence as well. That is in fact what we see in history: believers are always persecuted in some measure; but eventually Christianity triumphs and comes to profoundly influence the institutions of the societies it touches. . . . Ethically, this approach saves us from premature triumphalism and from undue pessimism and frustration. Suffering comes first, then glory; but the blood of the martyrs is the seed of a great church. And as we look back over two thousand years of Christian history, it is wonderful to see how divine providence, slowly but surely, brings triumph out of dark circumstances. The church follows the path of the cross, and it shares in the glory of the cross.” Frame, “Ethics and the Millennium,” n.p.



**Review Article of *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity*, 4 volumes, edited by Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014, 2015, 2016)**

WILLIAM DAVID SPENCER

Long term Miami University (Ohio) Professor Edwin Yamauchi is well published in Near-Eastern studies. His many publications include the books *Africa and Africans in Antiquity*; *Africa and the Bible*; *Archaeology and the Bible* (with Donald J. Wiseman); *The Archaeology of New Testament Cities in Western Asia Minor*; *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan* (co-edited with Jerry Vardaman); *Composition and Corroboration in Classical and Biblical Studies*; *Foes from the Northern Frontier*; *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins*; *Greece and Babylon*; *Harper's World of the New Testament*; *Mandaic Incantation Texts*; *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, (co-edited with Alfred J. Hoerth and Gerald L. Mattingly); *Persia and the Bible*; *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences*; *The Stones and The Scriptures: The Story of the Church* (with Robert G. Clouse and Richard V. Pierard); *Two Kingdoms: The Church and Culture Through the Ages* (with Robert G. Clouse and Richard V. Pierard).

Marvin R. Wilson, recently retired professor at Gordon College (MA), has added to his over 200 articles and reviews such books as *A Time to Speak: The Evangelical-Jewish Encounter* (co-edited with A. James Rudin); *Evangelicals and Jews in an Age of Pluralism* (co-edited with Marc H. Tanenbaum and A. James Rudin); *Evangelicals and Jews in Conversation* (co-edited with Profs. Tanenbaum and Rudin); *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal*; *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*; *A Workbook for New Testament Greek: Grammar and Exegesis in First John* (co-edited with Chris A. Vlachos).

Originally, these editors planned to write the present book series with R.K. Harrison, renowned former professor at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, and author of the authoritative textbook *Introduction to the Old Testament* among other noted works. At Professor Harrison's death, the project was expanded to include a plethora of other scholars, including those whose names will be familiar to evangelicals such as Drs. Scott Carroll, John J. Davis (of Grace Theological Seminary), Richard Hess, Craig Keener, Paul Maier, Gerald Mattingly, and others.

Initially envisioned with the title "Dictionary of Bible Manners and Customs," the idea expanded into a 30 year project, based on applying "the Human Relations Area Files, an anthropological grid of human society, which would systematically and comparatively survey different aspects of culture, whether they were highlighted in the Bible or not." Their choice to do so took into account that, with so many excellent commentaries and Bible encyclopedias available, along with multivolume sets like *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* and *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (not to mention one volume resources targeting specific periods like Henri Daniel-Rops's *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* and Joachim Jeremias's *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*), the need was not to replicate these resources, but to address "a serious deficiency," represented by the lack of a discussion of "Abortion," since such "references were keyed to the words which occurred in the Bible" and topics like "abortion" would simply elude notice (Vol.1, p.1).

As the project expanded, it became four volumes of increasing length. Book 1 has 400 pages, Book 2 480, Book 3 504, and Book 4 476. Each book includes a detailed table of contents, a similar introduction, a list of contributors, another of abbreviations, including sources and authors, a discussion of "periods, ages, and dates," a "selected bibliography," and several color pictures at the end of each. The content appears comprehensive:

Volume 1 (A-Da) covers entries on abortion (as noted), adoption, adultery, age and the aged, agriculture, alcoholic beverages, animal husbandry, aphrodisiacs and erotic spells, aqueducts and water supply, archives, armies, art, astrology, athletics, banks and loans, banquets, barbers and beards, baths and bathing, beggars and alms, bellows and furnaces, birds, boats and ships, bones and objects of bone, bottles and glass, bribery, butchers and meat, calendars, camels, celibacy, census, ceramics and pottery, childbirth and children, cities, citizens and aliens, clothing, communications and messengers, contraception and control of births, cosmetics, dance.

Volume 2 (De-H) includes death and the afterlife, demons, dentistry and teeth, diseases and plagues, divination and sortition, divorce, dogs, donkeys and mules, doors and keys, drama and theaters, dreams, dwellings, dyeing, education, eunuchs, fish and fishing, food consumption, food production, furniture, games and gambling, hair, harbors, heating and lighting, horses, human sacrifice.

Volume 3 (I-N) lists entries on incense, infanticide and exposure, inheritance, insects, ivory, jewelry, kisses and embraces, laundry and fullers, laws and crimes, leather, libraries and books, literacy, magic, marriage, medicine and physicians, medium of exchange, menstruation, metallurgy, military technology and tactics, milk and milk products, mining, mourning and weeping, music, names, nursing and wet nurses.

Volume 4 (O-Z) concludes the series with oaths and vows, palaces, perfumes, plants and flowers, police and prisons, prostitution, purity and impurity, rape, same-sex relations, sanitation, seals, slavery, spectacles, taxation, textiles, threshing and winnowing, time, tools and utensils, trade, trees, virgins and virginity, viticulture, wealth and poverty, weapons, widows and orphans, wild animals and hunting.

### Critique

That this is a mammoth resource is undeniable. The topics are intriguing and provide fascinating nourishment for all scholars who crave detail as a daily sustenance. At the same time, in its sheer vastness, this apparent one-stop-shopping for data has to be mapped out in a user's mind beforehand in order to be navigated toward any research destination. For example, shuffling through about 2,000 pages of entries may initially frustrate busy pastors who naturally assume that it is a cornucopia of sermon illustrations. While this is certainly true, one has to ask: what illustrations exactly does it provide? Let me highlight once more that in the introduction, Edwin Yamauchi indicates this resource was not intended to replace "Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias and popular books on biblical backgrounds available," but to fill a "deficiency" caused by "references" being "keyed to the words which occurred in the Bible." At the expense of repeating, one needs to take seriously his orienting statement that he "proposed a new framework...one based on the Human Relations Area Files, an anthropological grid of human society, which would systematically and comparatively survey different aspects of culture, whether they were highlighted in the Bible or not" (1:1). This would explain why one can find an entry on abortion but none on angels (though Editor Yamauchi contributes a detailed and interesting section on demons and Editor Wilson one on death and the afterlife<sup>1</sup>). Professional scholars, such as seminary and Bible college professors may take this intention in stride, but busy pastors may find it initially confusing.

For example, when I received the first volume, I was working on a Christmas sermon in my alternate avocational role as "founding pastor of encouragement" at Pilgrim Church in Beverly, MA, and not in my vocational role as a professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell's Boston Campus/Center for Urban Ministerial Education. "Just what I need," I thought and snapped up volume 1, turning immediately to "Bethlehem," but I found no entry. "Star," I reasoned. "I'll check

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1 Though in this latter entry, a grappling, if only briefly, with the puzzling appearance of Samuel after death (esp. 1 Sam. 28:15) would have been helpful to readers baffled at this incident and wondering how it fits in with the rest of the data shared in this informative section.

out the ‘Star of Bethlehem,’ since there was an entry on “astrology.” The magi were astrologers, I figured, let me see what I can glean. Not much in that discussion: just three passing references: “though the Christmas star led the Magi to Bethlehem, Christian leaders uniformly denounced astrology” (1:100), Justin Martyr positing that “the Magi revolted from demonic dominion by coming to worship Christ” (1:105), and Tertullian refuting the idea that “those Magi act as patron now also to astrologers,” since the birth of Christ had made gaining insight by astrology obsolete (1:106). Interesting ideas, but not too much there. The bibliography, tagged on the end of the entry, provides references on the star of Bethlehem in the *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society* and Mark Kidger’s book, *The Star of Bethlehem: An Astronomer’s View*. These are available on the internet and in the world catalogue, but the temptation was to fall back on my usual sources, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Eusebius, Daniel-Ropes and Jeremias’s books on life in Jesus’s time, excellent articles in the *Bulletin of Biblical Research*, and a superb discussion in Chan Kei Thong’s *Faith of our Fathers: God in Ancient China*, which includes a discussion on the ancient Chinese “Astronomy Records of the Book of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) from the second year of Jian Ping of Emperor Xias Ai (reigned B.C. 7-1)” which notes:

In the second month of the second year, the comet was out of Altair for more than 70 days. It is said, “Comets appear to signify the old being replaced by the new.” Altair, the sun, the moon and the five stars are in movement to signify the beginning of a new epoch, the beginning of a new year, a new month and a new day. The appearance of this comet undoubtedly symbolizes change. The extended appearance of this comet indicates that this is of great importance.<sup>2</sup>

Prof. Chan Kei Thong explains, “Altair is one of the 15 brightest stars, the brightest in the constellation Aquila,”<sup>3</sup> adding “Although the Chinese did not know about the birth of Jesus, they were so convinced of the ‘great importance’ surrounding the comet’s appearance and its association with a new beginning that, according to the same historical record, some imperial ministers proposed changing the name of that year from the ‘Second Year of Jian Ping’ to the ‘First Year of Tai Chu...’ which literally means ‘Genesis’ or ‘the Grand Beginning.’ This change was adopted and lasted until the eighth month when the original reign title of Jian Ping was restored.”<sup>4</sup> This kind of information, of course, is pastoral pay-dirt.<sup>5</sup>

When volume 3 of *The Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity* was published, I did check into the entry on “magic” to see if the magi were present there. They were, again briefly, but imagine my disappointment with what I discovered:

In the NT is the episode of the so-called “wise men” (Gk. *magoi*) from the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 2:1-12). These individuals (the number of which is not actually mentioned in the Bible) are never referred to as kings (as certain postbiblical traditions suggest), but are rather called “Magi from the east” (Gk. *magoi apo anatolōn*; Matt 2:1). Their arrival is based on the observance of a star, an astronomical sign within

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2 Chan Kei Thong, *Faith of Our Fathers: God in Ancient China* (Shanghai, China: China Publishing Group Orient Publishing Center, 2006), 313.

3 Chan Kei Thong, *Faith of Our Fathers: God in Ancient China*, 313 n. 14.

4 Why was this celestial phenomenon accorded such importance? “Even more significant than the response of changing the reign title was the association the Chinese astronomers made between Altair and the Border Sacrifice... They made this connection because Altair’s Chinese name is ‘Bull...(niu)...an unblemished calf was the sacrifice of choice to Shang Di [the ancient Chinese name of God, see Tsu-Kung Chuang, “Shang-di: God from the Chinese Perspective,” in Aída Besançon Spencer and William David Spencer, eds., *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 186-206], so the Chinese linked the appearance of this star to the Border Sacrifice.” As an interpretation in the Han Dynasty astronomy records states: “The primary meaning of Altair, the key supporting pillar of the heavens, is the Perfect Sacrifice,” Chan Kei Thong, *Faith of Our Fathers: God in Ancient China*, 313-315.

5 One concludes from it that, if the Chinese astronomers were following the appearance of this astronomical event so carefully, one would imagine other astronomers were doing the same.

the purview of *magoi* expertise. Their appearance in the Gospel account is brief and appears to be a literary device used to demonstrate the acceptance of Jesus as messiah by pagan intellectuals. (3:205-6).

While the author does not clearly state that Matthew invented what the author terms the “so-called ‘wise men,’” to me his wording seems to suggest a disturbing dismissal of this account. Compare this treatment, for example, with similar details discussed by the astute grammarian A.T. Robertson:

(*Megas*) *magnus*...is the same word as our “magician” and it sometimes carried that idea as in the case of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9, 11) and of Elyas Barjesus (Acts 13:6, 8). But here in Matthew the idea seems to be rather that of astrologers. Babylon was the home of astrology, but we only know that the men were from the east whether Arabia, Babylon, Persia, or elsewhere. The notion that they were kings arose from an interpretation of Isa. 60:3; Rev. 21:24. The idea that they were three in number is due to the mention of three kinds of gifts...These men may have been Jewish proselytes and may have known of the Messianic hope, for even Vergil had caught a vision of it. The whole world was on tiptoe of expectancy for something. Moulton (*Journal of Theological Studies*, 1902, p. 524) “refers to the Magian belief that a star could be the *fravashi*, the counterpart or angel (cf. Matt. 18:10) of a great man” (McNeile). They came to worship the newly born king of the Jews...Alford is positive that no miracle is intended by the report of the Magi or by Matthew in his narrative. But one must be allowed to say that the birth of Jesus, if really God’s only Son who has become Incarnate, is the greatest of all miracles. Even the methods of astrologers need not disturb those who are sure of this fact.<sup>6</sup>

To me, in comparing these two treatments, the author of the *Dictionary of Daily Life* in his articulate and information-laden entry, by reducing the “so-called wise men” to a “literary device,” appears in his language to be suggesting that the magi may never have existed but were invented by the Gospel writer to make a point about the universal appeal of the Christ child to “pagan intellectuals.” The author of the entry piles up an impressive amount of information in the selected areas of the Near-Eastern, Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Worlds categories, including another reference to the “magos,” on page 212. But, again, the value to a reader largely depends on what one is seeking. This author does not appear to seek, as did Dr. Chan Kei Thong, other astrologers who may have noted “the Bethlehem Star” in all the data researched for the entry, but, instead, seems to me in his presentation to lean more toward the “secular” hermeneutic view promoted by Professor Michael V. Fox of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, as the most viable approach for academic Bible scholarship in a Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) forum piece several years ago, claiming that “faith-based study has no place in academic scholarship, whether the object of study is the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or Homer. Faith-based study is a different realm of intellectual activity that can dip into Bible scholarship for its own purposes, but cannot contribute to it,” such that “trained scholars quickly learn to recognize which authors and publications are governed by faith and tend to set them aside.” Why would a “trained scholar” do that? Because Prof. Fox claims he or she would know that “the best thing for Bible appreciation is secular, academic, religiously-neutral hermeneutic.” And why would that be? Because this SBL author affirms Jacques Berlinerblau’s “secular hermeneutic,” believing “secular scholarship allows the Bible to be seen as a rich and vital mixture of texts from an ancient people in search of God and moral culture.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, denial of the actual content of the Bible’s claims for revelation,

6 Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1930), 15-17.

7 Michael V. Fox, University of Wisconsin, Madison, “Bible Scholarship and Faith-Based Study: My View,” SBL Forum, <https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=490>. Defending himself before a flurry of responses, Professor Fox replied: “I did not say that secular Bible scholarship is a ‘value-neutral activity’ or ‘postulate free,’ nor did I

replaced by a view that such an approach (seeing the Bible as a “search for God” not a recorded revelation of God) would be more scholarly and presumably objective.

Such a “secular hermeneutic,” of course, is certainly not “neutral.” It is actually a faith stance, as the perceptive professor of sociology Dr. George Yancey of the University of North Texas so poignantly observes from his own experience in academia:

When I was an adjunct professor, I was assigned to four classes in a semester. One class was sociology of race and ethnicity, one was sociology of religion, and the other two were introduction to sociology courses. Soon thereafter I learned that some faculty had misgivings about my ability to teach the religion class because I was a Christian. They feared that I would be biased. However, the fact that I am an African American did not create any fear about my bias in teaching the race and ethnicity course. While all professors bring some bias into their teaching (an atheist certainly brings bias to a sociology of religion course), the comments of these professors indicated that black racial bias is acceptable while Christian religious bias is not. I have encountered more barriers in academia because of my faith than because of my race.<sup>8</sup>

I highlight this treatment of the magi in this particular entry of *The Dictionary of Daily Life* entry not because I am questioning the validity of the author’s academic qualifications (they are very high) or his scholarly reach (it is extensive) or even that I am concluding this author is without faith and, therefore, inappropriate to write for a book intended for an audience of Bible scholars. Not at all. What I am saying is that the hermeneutic of doubt that this statement appears to apply is not necessarily more scholarly than one of faith nor is its data as presented more helpful to readers. If he is applying the secular hermeneutic, that is not an end-all in itself. It still begs the question: is its conclusion valid? On what grounds should the magi be reduced to a literary technique and is that decision denying the validity of the magi account, their actual existence, their journey, their responses? Does this interpretation contain any proof at all that his conclusion about them is accurate? Does it actually prove anything? Does it simply undercut the biblical record with a kind of “drive-by” of secular political correctness? How does it move a “Dictionary of Daily Life” in Bible times forward? Does it move readers forward in its brevity, or simply undercut their faith in the Bible record? Theology Professor Fred Keefe of the Conwell School of Theology used to tell students that professors write books to one another and the problem occurs when laypeople listen in. But, I think, what is happening here is a synecdoche of a trend that is being seen across biblical scholarship.

For example, when Mark Kidger’s book was released by Princeton University Press, it was reviewed by various scientific community journals like *New Scientist* and *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* together with the Rutgers University Press book *The Star of Bethlehem: the Legacy of the Magi* by Michael Molnar, both books being published in 1999. According to *New*

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call for a ‘neutral hermeneutic.’ I was calling for a religiously neutral hermeneutic... It must be granted that much of the most valuable scholarship in our field has been permeated by religious agendas, often unrecognized. This is a special problem of our field, but it is not overwhelming. Scholarship, such as nineteenth century German endeavors, had all sorts of religious presuppositions and agendas, but its arguments were usually based on a secular frame... For those of us who teach in state-sponsored universities, secularity in the classroom is essential to professional integrity—and effectiveness. In that setting, presuppositions of faith stifle honest communication, and rational analysis gives way to pronouncements and preachments, often of an angry sort. Clearly the ‘faith-base’ advocates have an agenda that reaches into the classroom, including in the secular university. (Or do they have a special religiously neutral hermeneutic for use in teaching?) In this context, faith-based teaching amounts to religious propaganda to a captive audience. Secularity has been, if I may put it this way, a great blessing to Bible study and research, for it allow its practitioners and teachers to work together with full and open communication. This seems like a rather important ‘pragmatic’ argument.” Michael V. Fox, “Response from Michael V. Fox,” Society of Biblical Literature, SBL Forum Archives, S <https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=521>.

8 George Yancey, *Hostile Environment: Understanding and Responding to Anti-Christian Bias* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 12.



Scientist reviewer David Hughes, “In his highly readable *The Star of Bethlehem: An Astronomer’s View*,” Mark Kidger leans toward “the triple coming together of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces, calculated to have happened in 7 BC. And Chinese diaries record a comet or nova appearing in the constellation of Capricorn in the March of 5 BC, and a nova or tail-less comet in Aquila in April, 4 BC,” while Michael Molnar prefers “a lunar eclipse of Jupiter in the constellation of Aries ‘the Ram’, near the time of its dawn rising on 17 April, 6 BC.” David Hughes adds, “Molnar impressively interweaves clues from a Syrian coin, minted about AD 13 and showing a star over a ram, with a skilful interpretation of Greek Ptolemaic astrology, in which Aries symbolised Syria.” Then reviewer David Hughes points out his own findings, “When I investigated the same topic more than twenty years ago, I followed in the footsteps of the 19th-century German astronomer and philologist Christian Ideler. Like him, I plumped for the planetary conjunction, mainly because in Jewish astrology it suggested the overtaking of the old king (Saturn) by the new (Jupiter)-in Pisces, associated with Israel. It was also sufficiently insignificant to the non-stargazer to explain why Herod was surprised when the Magi turned up on his doorstep. This conjunction indicated that Christ was born near Tuesday 15 September, 7 BC.” What we are seeing here is that all three scientists, the two authors and the reviewer, take the reports of the star’s appearance and the magi’s journey seriously.<sup>9</sup> Given this fact, interesting to note then is that, when the *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* reviewer C. Davenhall lists the options, “At least three possible types of explanation have been proposed for [Matthew’s] story of the star: that it was a fabrication, a supernatural event, or a report of an astronomical phenomenon.” He adds, “Biblical scholars usually, though not universally, prefer the first alternative and consider the account a ‘Midrash’, a story concocted for allegorical and instructional purposes,” and he appears to take that observation as guidance and, therefore, seems to lean in that direction.<sup>10</sup> If this latter reviewer is right, that Biblical scholars “usually” these days consider this event “a fabrication,” what does that tell us about the state of current biblical studies? That, while scientists are debating which data on astronomical records describe actual events that are commensurate with the appearance of the Star of Bethlehem and, thereby, best explain this recognized historical phenomenon, biblical scholars with no interest in their findings are dismissing the Bible’s record of the event as a “story concocted for allegorical and instructional purposes”?

So my disappointment is more than simply saying that a statement like the one quoted will hardly preach in evangelical churches. It is saying a bit more than that. Editor Edwin Yamauchi himself is a recognized expert on the Mandaean, from whom the magi were probably drawn. Reading extensively in his careful work, I am not convinced that he thinks he has invested his career in studying a myth. So, I am wondering how this unsupported piece of speculation about the magi (even taking into account all the mass of data heaped around it) slipped by the editors into a Hendrickson biblical resource book. Such a conundrum is certainly baffling to me and a phenomenon I have been noticing more and more as I review books for use with my students. What I am wondering is: is this paragraph a synecdoche of what is happening across the wide spectrum of current biblical studies, and not just in what would be considered “liberal” hermeneutics? And, if that is so, if what is being observed here is, as *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* reviewer Davenhall suggests, “usually” the opinion of Bible scholars these days across the scope of biblical studies, including the adopted view of scholars in evangelical works, as well, then are we evangelical scholars bending over backwards to try and impress the academic world of the secular

9 David Hughes, “*The Star of Bethlehem: An Astronomer’s View* by Mark Kidger [*The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magic* by Michael Molnar]” <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg16422185-800-the-star-of-bethlehem-an-astronomers-view-by-mark-kidger/>

10 C Davenhall, “Reviews: *The Star of Bethlehem: An Astronomer’s View* by Mark Kidger; *The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magic* by Michael Molnar,” *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* (ISSN 1440-2807), Vol. 3, No. 2, p. 169-172 (2000), c. Astral Press, provided by the NASA Astrophysics Data System, [http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/npharticle\\_query?bibcode=2000JAHH....3Q.169D&db\\_key=AST&page\\_ind=0&data\\_type=GIF&type=SCREEN\\_VIEW&classic=YES](http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/npharticle_query?bibcode=2000JAHH....3Q.169D&db_key=AST&page_ind=0&data_type=GIF&type=SCREEN_VIEW&classic=YES)

hermeneutic that we can be “religiously neutral” too? And, if so, why would we do that? Is that our mission: simply to earn a place at the academic table by accepting what may prove to be an unacceptable approach to the Bible in light of the damage it may do to our understanding of the revelation entrusted to us and, as a result, to the understanding of those to whom we have been commissioned to interpret that revelation? Or should we be more inclined, for example, in a case like the one under discussion, to listen in and assess the data that the scientists are debating, study that, and apply such information to our evaluation of the biblical texts in the spirit of 1 Peter 3:15?

I do not know if the author of this *Dictionary of Daily Life* entry self-identifies as evangelical Christian or not, but he has raised several helpful questions for me that I feel are appropriate to ask in the *Africanus Journal*. By asking them, rather than trying to pick on this particular author, who is obviously scholarly, articulate, and well versed in his field, I am trying to demonstrate that a hermeneutic of doubt – in this case that the magi are basically a “literary device” to make a point and are dismissed in a few words making that point – has implications for the rest of the value or veracity of the account, whether intended by the author of the entry or not.

If there were no magi and no gift of gold, then how could this poor family afford to go to Egypt and survive there?<sup>11</sup> Or was there actually no need for Mary and Joseph and their baby to flee at all and that is another “literary device?” Perhaps there was no killing of the “so-called” innocents? Maybe this impoverished family never went further from Bethlehem than back to Nazareth, the flight to Egypt and the slaughter of the innocents being each another “literary device” to symbolize the hostility of the Idumean ruler to a legitimate Jewish heir to this usurped throne. In other words, where does the secular hermeneutic of doubt stop? Is it all just a made-up story surrounding this simple carpenter who preached love and ended up dead for his efforts in this evil world? Essentially, how much of the gospel account can one dismantle before there is nothing left?<sup>12</sup>

In summary, this series of volumes is a mixture of ideas from diverse points of view, many I found helpful and some unhelpful, much data relevant and some less relevant (depending, of course, on the goals of one’s search), and readers need to be cognizant to remain selective and sift through this mine.

Let me balance my complaint about the speculation on the wise men with a contrasting example I found useful in the excellent entry on “Boats & Ships,” where we actually learn the dimensions of the ark of Noah, translated from cubits into feet: The entry reads: “The ark (tēbâ) of Noah is a special case; the word designates a huge boat only in Gen 6:14–9:18. Clearly it was intended simply to float rather than be sailed, paddled, poled, or steered. Its dimensions were colossal: 300 cubits (450 ft.) long, 50 cubits (75 ft.), and 30 cubits (45 ft.) high (Gen 6:15)” (1:190). True, this data was already available in such excellent resources as the NIV notes to Zondervan’s yet unmatched *Archaeological Study Bible*, but what I am saying is that it is refreshing to see the ark treated in the present dictionary under discussion not as myth, but as a real matter of biblical information.

Further, as another example, I found much helpful data I could use for another sermon I was writing on Paul and Silas’s encounter with the Philippian jailer. In volume 4, I discovered Emperor Augustus was the originator of the “urban cohort” (4:85), the watchmen/city police who would have escorted Paul and Silas to the city jail of Philippi. I also learned more details about the horror that routinely beset Roman jails, where “Roman prisoners were usually chained or manacled during the day, fastened into painful leg stocks at night, and held in quarters so cramped that they sometimes trampled each other to death.” Also, “Extreme crowding resulted in lack of oxygen,

11 Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, rev. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), 884, col. 1-col 2.

12 And what if true facts about true individuals slip away through this colander of an imagined “bias free” theory of secular interpretation?



intense heat, horrific filth, and the spread of disease and lice” (4:85). Besides omitting rats and extreme thirst, as emphasized in other accounts I have read, this information is more than sufficient to correct modern misunderstanding from equating what contemporary congregants know about present prisons to what Paul and Silas and other biblical figures actually experienced when incarcerated for the gospel. With such detailed description, Jesus’s words in Matthew 25:31-46 become all the more poignant.

Now, some might think that, since the introduction distanced the book from Bible handbook type resources, any such comparisons are illegitimate. But, obviously, I disagree. Dr. Yamauchi is right that the book is intended to provide a supplement to common resources, but that is the very proof that, if it is a *supplement*, then it must move users forward in Bible times-related knowledge that may be contextual to the Bible. Writers of the entries will include some interpretation, even if it is not intended to be an interpretive commentary on the Scriptures, but, if this work is regarded in its intended and self-expressed supplementary role, it will help you fill in context and color to make, for example, first person narrative sermons come alive with rich details you may not find elsewhere. It may take a bit of effort to learn how best to use it, and conservative readers may not find all the interpretations that it may have to be hospitable to a high reading of Scripture. But, as noted, its writers include many evangelical scholars with whom, for example, an inerrancy of the Bible-oriented pastor or scholar will resonate. It also includes a wider breadth of experts with whose speculations on interpretation one may not agree, as we saw with the magi example, but their scholarship will still provide a wealth of supplementary material that can be helpful for a discerning reader. One simply embraces the best and discards the rest. Such an approach, of course, is also true for the use of other excellent resources like the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* as well. All such books are a case of *caveat emptor* – let the buyer beware. The *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity* is certainly a vast treasure trove of data and well worth digging through any slag in order to uncover the rich ore it contains.

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## Review Article of *Assessment for Counseling in Christian Perspective* by Stephen P. Greggo (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2019)

CARLOT DUCASSE CELESTIN

This book, *Assessment for Counseling in Christian Perspective*, attempts to comprehend and incorporate into a clinical setting the understanding of assessment with a Christian perspective, which means: to measure spiritual growth variables, or to examine faith and the matter of faith from a contemporary psychotherapeutic perspective that is particularly informed by Christian perspective theory. Since the emergence of Sigmund Freud, classical psychoanalysis, and the development of psychology, there has been a noticeable antagonism and separateness, which have characterized the relationship between psychoanalysis, psychology, and religion or spirituality. To arrive at a consensus about how to do Christian therapy has been a serious challenge. Everyone does what seems to be right in their own setting. And, among the Evangelicals, both clinicians and theologians, such antagonistic sentiment is a *l'ordre du jour*. Recently, with the emergence of pastoral counseling and cross-cultural understanding, a question has risen concerning how to distinguish between demon possession, neurosis/psychosis, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. There, a fertile ground emerges for exploring how psychoanalytic understanding can be unfolded to produce a clinical and theological dialogue, particularly from an object-relations standpoint. Hence, comes a need to comprehend the convergence and divergence between spirituality and neurosis/psychosis. Stephen Greggo, who is a professor of counseling and chair of the counseling department at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, offers training in mental health to professionals addressing these issues, via assessment. He came up with the understanding that Christian ministry is a soul care ministry. As a licensed clinical psychologist, a pastor, and a Christian counselor, he maintains the idea that there is a fine association between the person conducting the therapy (analyst) and the analysand (the person in therapy). This is understood in assessment.

In this book, Greggo seeks to find a common ground where historical antagonism can be replaced by offering a comprehensive view of a psychoanalytic, or psychological, or therapeutic understanding in society, faith, and culture, to keep the dialogue in search for a viable process of intervention. To the question – Does a Christian worldview offer distinguishing parameters for assessment practice? – Greggo presents a very clear guideline and process to client retention, treatment completion, and aftercare planning. He argues (p. 42) that assessment is vital to effective intervention. It should be guided by theory, must occur on multiple levels, and it should be ongoing and practical.

Greggo defines the counselor as an artisan of the heart (p. 58), a specialist who examines words and behaviors to discern the intricate ties between the events that link them. Having argued that assessment is extensive, Greggo outlines different approaches to do counseling with different multicultural groups. He begins with measurement scales to explain the various aspects of measurement, standardization (the broad features related to psychometrics), statistics, and norming (or control population). “Information” details how each item was formed, reviewed, and revised. “Reliability” refers to the consistency and stability of the tool used to gather information (pp. 28-30). “Validity” refers to the degree to which the test measured the elements that it said it was going to measure with the intention for which it was purposed. Greggo argues that in counseling assessment the tools remain objective (p. 84). He takes an approach known as *ethnosociocultural model*<sup>1</sup> which emphasizes that each individual in therapy needs to be evaluated. The therapist may start with the family system, the marriage, and the extended family, just to understand the

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1 Carlot Celestin, *A Historical Overview of Marriage and Family Counseling in the Haitian Milieu: A Practical Application of a Theologically Integrated Systemic Counseling Method*, A Thesis submitted to Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, 2008.

social norms that govern the behavior of the family members. Having gone thus far, the therapist may safely move on to engage other assessments done by the family members or other individuals concerned in the client's community.

#### SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT

Probably the one single most important aspect of counseling is assessment during the psychological evaluation. Without an assessment, most of counseling is meaningless. The interview provides valuable information that may be otherwise unattainable, such as behavioral observations, idiosyncratic features about the client, the individual reaction to current situation and life stressors. It must be noted that the interview is not a simple conversation. It is the first step of assessment. It has a clear sequence and is organized in such a way to meet an objective.

Regardless of the style used, the interviews all had these common objectives: to obtain a psychological portrait of a person, to conceptualize what is causing the person's distress, to make a diagnosis, and to formulate a treatment plan. In therapy, the clinician considers the interview as an interactive system in which the participants simultaneously influenced each other. This therapeutic alliance emphasizes an interactive, self-maintaining system that becomes a development and formalization of behavior assessment, primarily in the form of goals-directed interviews that focus on understanding and confirming the current and past reinforcers as well as on establishing new workable target behavior.

Many have undertaken to present a comprehensive view of how to conduct an assessment. Some have proposed very good steps. But none of them amount to what Greggo is offering as a *marche a suivre* in a Christian perspective. He asserts that "*START is my mnemonic for steps and outcomes involved in a early, pace-setting session [story, therapeutic alliance, assessment, recommendations and treatment plan]*" (p. 48). At the first step, the story telling level, the free association model is the framework that allows the client to speak freely without interruption and interference in the story telling. "Once the clinician discovers a sense of what is to be addressed, the prerequisite exploration of past traumas can commence" (p. 154). Relational distress can be unpacked for cognitive and behavioral distortions and disorders. The free association model framework can relieve the pressure from being intrusive, but it can also pollute the mind of the client, and miss the rare opportunity for a "high-touch, meaningful interpersonal encounter" (p. 156) with the client, which is a useful and indispensable element for building rapport and establishing trust between client and analyst.

When hearing the story of the patient, a basic dimension of the degree of understanding of the interview can be structured accordingly. It can use a free association (p. 71) format which offers the flexibility of high rapport, the ability to assess how clients organize their thoughts and responses and the potential to explore unique details clients have to share about their own life stories and histories. It may result in distrusting the reliability and validity of the assessment. However, the potential for use in research and the capacity to discover the person in therapy is paramount to great success. Regardless of the structure, any interview needs to accomplish specific goals, such as assessing the client's strengths, level of adjustment, the nature and history of the problem, diagnosis and relevance of the personal story,

The original interview is the principal source of data collection. The diagnosis is in the story. Neuroscientists argue that consciousness begins when people's brains acquire the power of telling a story. Human beings are said to be story tellers. Stories are the best vehicle known to human beings for conveying how and why a human agent, endowed with consciousness and motivated by intention, enacts desires. This is where the dialogue becomes paramount to therapy. Greggo says, "Counseling is strategic dialogue within a carefully constructed therapeutic relationship to stimulate growth" (p. 34) and strives for goals over time.

The START format indicates that the second phase of assessment (therapeutic alliance) is actually an assessment in itself. That is, this is the place to find the actual content for “consultation” (p. 162). In this phase the counselor should: “1) praise client functioning, safety, and readiness for counseling related to the reason the client comes to therapy; 2) secure the information for immediate decisions and documentation requirements and to identify the problem in order to highlight potential treatment directions” (p. 162). Greggo argues that in the START interviews the clinician is responsible to set the standard for the interview, which includes a basic interaction of questions and answers.

What sets Greggo and his book apart is his focus on assessment for counseling with a Christian perspective. He explains that “according to biblical narrative, the human heart is the center of relational orientation, emotional health, a spiritual well-being” [see Deut 4:29; Ps 73:26; Lk 6:45; Greggo 2011; Saucy 2013 (p. 28)]. He takes very seriously the typical path that all personologists would normally take to assess a client. “Personologists,” people who spend time studying the human person, engaging in assessment, are especially sensitive to individual differences. Assessment begins with information gathered during the interview (pp. 28-30). Generally, this is the point where the clinicians seek to know what is the underlying matter that will lead to the diagnosis, the prognosis, and the treatment plan for the person in therapy. Then the counselor moves to define assessment by defining the task of assessment. Assessment is an inventory. Inventory is a relationally based measure designed to assess different dimensions of one’s development. Greggo writes about assessment in terms of psychological testing and psychological assessment. The understanding is that assessment continues to be an important topic for psychologists interested in human development and interrelationship. Assessment may be defined as a “time limited, formal process that collects clinical assessment” [p. 116, and information from any sources in order to reach a diagnosis, to make a prognosis, to render a biopsychosocial, a social formulation and to determine treatment.<sup>2</sup> This definition accentuates the fact that assessment is a deliberate act on the part of a therapist to gather specific information for therapeutic purposes. It also underlines the notion that assessment is a constant endeavor by which the clinician reassesses the patient as treatment proceeds. Assessment precedes treatment.

Greggo argues that assessment demands that one take into consideration data conflicts as revealed and use assessment as the tool or vehicle to navigate goals and objectives of the sessions. Greggo argues that assessment can be extensive. But his focus is on the Christian perspective that is often missed in this important appraisal. He looks at assessment as intervention. It is a bridge to cross to reach the desired goals while the clinician is trying to penetrate the relational land of the client. It is at this point that the assessment highlights individual differences and needs which can be used to determine optimal method to begin treatment.

## A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTENT

### Issues Related to Reliability and Validity

Confirmatory bias is also at the order of the day. The bias typically occurs when clinicians develop initial diagnostic impressions from historical information but then ignore later relevant information since they are too busy confirming traditional cultural norms or primeval beliefs in general. Issues related to traumas are often one of the main causes leading clinicians to exaggerate pathology. Some specific areas of distortion must be represented by the victim as a disorder in order to merit focus on the assessment. Often during an interview, due to lack of time for the session, clinicians lead the interview process and shortcut it to a simple interrogation by directing a series of questions to the counselee. The interview is the first step of the assessment (START, p. 148). It must be non-directive as opposed to being directive. There must be a sequence to it that

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2 Jerrold S. Maxmen and Nicholas G. Ward, *Essential Psychopathology and Its Treatment* (New York: Norton, 1995), 19.

facilitates the conversation to help clients to tell their story. There could be confrontation during this process, closed opened statements and questions, but it must include a comprehensive way that will lead to full disclosure. The interpretation of the data is the final phase of the assessment.

Often there is a life story that is missed. There is the Christian perspective and the counselee's walk with his Lord. When stories are being told, people typically remember the gist of an important life event as time passes, but they often misremember the details. Stories are cultural and religious in context. Stories often mirror the particular culture in which each story is created and told. The story embodies the person. Personality is shaped by the interaction between biological predispositions and the environment. If clinicians can carefully follow each interaction, they could predict the outcomes. Repeated interactions constitute one's learning history. We know that learned responses to various environmental stimuli are organized into schemas, which have cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral components. Schemas where therapy latches on to behaviorist thinking. So, as the cognitive processes clinicians use language as manipulating symbols for the purpose of expression to meet clients where they are. At this level the therapeutic alliance becomes very important. Clinicians assess the Cognitive Distortions,<sup>3</sup> the arbitrary inferences; selective abstraction (a detail taken out of context); overgeneralization (applying a rule based on isolated incidences).

### **Targets for Change and Treatment Plan**

Assessment is meant to navigate change. A journey to change or one adjusting one's goals from change to a continuing process toward healing is the theme that Greggo is pursuing in this book. Mental health, which the writer of this article defines as the absence of mental illness, is one of the most difficult professional fields to be in. Its main focus is personality, about which evaluation is often difficult to be conclusive. This book is written to "pinpoint an accurate diagnostic profile that tracks smoothly with the treatment options" (p. 3) of personality or mood disorder and understanding this profile from a Christian perspective and providing an intervention that is Christian.

Everything about a human is a reflection of personality. Some contend that personality only exists in the eyes of the observer. Hence, they mistakenly associate personality to all things, human and animal alike. However, personality is the sum total of a person's thoughts, feelings, desires, intentions and actions or tendencies, including the unique way the person displays his or her character traits. This is true whether the focus of assessment is cognitive, affective, or behavioral. Theoretically, the peripheral statement about the person's life is the most important aspect in dealing with the human being. "Personality is all that contributes to the person's individuality" (p. 189). Arguably, descriptive assessment becomes a necessary exercise. Instead of starting the book with a definition of assessment, Greggo begins by outlining the reason for assessment. He argues that assessment is information. "It informs both counselors and clients... it reveals the presence of obstacles, stabilize risk from nonproductive expectations, and safeguard good will in the helping partnership itself" (p. 4). This perception of the purpose of assessment is very accurate and insightful. Greggo seeks to enable counselors to put assessment in practice (pp. 162, 194 ff). The task of the assessment is to evaluate the person against a series of norms by which he or she lives and comprehends maturity and growth in the context of his or her environment. Hence, he argues that assessment is important primarily because it serves the needs of people. Assessment can help evaluate theory and contribute new observations that may influence future theorizing.

### **Analyzing the Work**

The assessment typically consists of seven primary elements: 1) obtain a history of the chief complaint, 2) history of the patient's present illness, 3) record of past psychiatric or psychological

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<sup>3</sup> James, R. Beck, *Jesus and Personality Theory: Exploring the Five-Factors Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 1999).

intervention, 4) history of the patient's developmental stages, 5) family history, 6) psychiatric or psychological medical history, 7) and a physical examination. In order to evaluate patients' mental health status, counselors should consider their physical and emotional appearance, behavior impulse control, speech pattern and emotional reaction (mood, affect, congruency, thought process and content, usage of words, and continuity of thought and content, perception and attention span, sense of patients' orientation and ability to tell stories in a chronological order, to determine time, space, and memory content to know what is immediate and recent, a sense of judgment, level of intelligence, ability to distinguish concrete and abstraction and insight. In addition, counselors should collect auxiliary data— if necessary, interviews should also focus on relatives and friends to complete medical histories and as well gather information about each patient's medical history by a physical examination by a professional medical doctor, lab test, standardized interviews, psychological testing and other interventions, while taking into account other previous interventions. Finally, the assessor should summarize the findings, formulate a diagnosis, make a prognosis, create a biopsychosocial formulation, and determine a treatment plan. This plan can be both short and long for immediate management of the chief complaint (a short-term intervention that would lead to long term intervention).

### **Central Assumptions**

In this context, the assessment is the place to understand the cry and to hear the cry of the heart. Central to this is the search for wisdom. It is the place where the wisdom of the clinician and that of the client merges. In this therapeutic conversation (pp. 40-41), assessment is the lens to underline effective therapeutic conversation (Prov. 1:7). In this context, Greggo is right to say that assessment is a strategic and systematic search in conversation, a communication (p. 42) that opens up the heart to hear the patient's story. A counselor who aspires to provide relief for the client must also care to provide care for the soul. This Christian perspective on assessment examines Scripture (pp. 44-50) to develop a narrative.

Patients are people and, even though individuals may be poor or rich, they are proud of their historical values. Patients are a courageous people who face the struggles of life. They value their ties with their cultural heritage as well as their community. Individual behavior can be understood across cultures only when both cultural and biological features are taken into account. Acculturative stress has been linked with some fatal experiences in human beings of all communities. Assessment is needed in this area to understand the true nature of acculturative stress and how to cope with it better. Greggo presents a Christian worldview to assessment in counseling. He looks at the theological understanding of sanctification and the self. What a great tool for Christian counselors!

Carlot Ducasse Celestin, D.Min; Psya.D (Cand.), is Assistant Pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Congregation and Adjunct Professor of Counseling at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-Boston.



## Review of *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists: Sharing the Gospel Authentically* by Mark Teasdale (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016)

PAUL F. BRICKER

Dr. Mark Teasdale, E. Stanley Jones Associate Professor of Evangelism at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, has produced an excellent book for helping Christians share their faith. He starts out his book intending to shock the reader. He writes about certain individuals: “These individuals included a humanist who leads worship in an Episcopalian congregation; a person who grew up in the church, is married to a pagan of the same sex and has begun questioning his own Christian beliefs; a pantheist who is married to an atheist; a member of a liberal mainline Protestant denomination who is in full agreement with the progressive political and theological agendas brought forward in that denomination; and a self-described evangelical who is struggling to find a place as a church planter within a mainline denomination...” (p.1) Then Professor Teasdale shares that these were just some of the students in his Evangelism class. He concludes: “This is the reality of teaching in a mainline denominational seminary today” (Ibid.) When I read about that group of people, I thought that it sounded like Thanksgiving meal at my home. The world has infiltrated our churches and homes.

What is the gospel? Dr. Teasdale writes: “My own view of the good news accepts the incarnation, death and bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and looks forward to Jesus returning to establish the Kingdom of God in glory” (p. 6). He is not interested in sharing with us exactly how to do a form of evangelism but how to share the gospel authentically. That leads us to his four tools with which to share the gospel “authentically.”

Tool One is “starting point.” The word “evangelism” comes from the Greek *eu* meaning “good” and *angelos* meaning “message.” Thus, evangelism starts with figuring out how God has been good to oneself. This introspection is vital to sharing the gospel authentically. One is not only sharing the objective good news, but one is sharing the objective good news from the point of view of how the objective good news has affected the person sharing the objective good news.

The author of this review would like to share a biblical example of this starting point of how we ought to relate to others. Another way the book could have started is with the following. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, the Apostle Paul writes: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” Note the progression: 1. God is the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort. 2. God comforts us in our afflictions. 3. As a follow-up, we then share with others who are afflicted the comfort we have received from God.

Tool Two is “theological reflection” (ch. 3). Dr. Teasdale writes: “The second leg of our journey in navigating evangelism involves reflecting theologically on our starting point” (p. 45). We sometimes think we are more biblical than we actually are. We are a product of our theological traditions as well as being formed by God through the word. We need to reflect on that and find an effective integration that pleases God and presents rather than obscures the salvific message of what Christ’s sacrifice has done in creating the way for reconciling with God.

Tool Three is “Putting the Good News in Context” (ch. 4). One needs to share the gospel within a culture with cultural sensitivity. The Apostle Paul wrote: “To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews.... To those who are without the law, as without the law..., so that I might win those who are without the law” (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Finally, Tool Four is “Fashioning New Wineskins for the Old, Old Story.” This is the “creative practice” of sharing the gospel. Teasdale writes: “Evangelistic practices are not just means to advance a specific message; they are manifestations of the actual good news. The practices we develop should flow naturally from what we claim the good news to be” (p. 81f.).

I think the above are the beginning steps that churches and denominations should take to present the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in an authentic manner to our changing world. I think it would be good for there to be a national conference based on this book, fielding papers presented on sharing the gospel authentically.

Paul F. Bricker, B.A. in Philosophy from West Virginia University, M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary, helped start Alpha Omega Community Theological School in Newark New Jersey (1974). Ordained as an evangelist within the Deliverance Family of Churches (1978), he planted New Life Bible Church in Philadelphia (1980), Body of Christ Church (1985), and, with other leaders, Pilgrim Church (1989), in Beverly MA. Recently, he served as Pastor of Church Growth for District Three of the West Virginia Conference of the Advent Christian Church (1997-2001), Pastor of Pax Advent Christian Church (2000-2008), and now serves as Copastor of Beckley Advent Christian Church and Hospice Chaplain at the Beckley Veteran’s Administration Hospital (2008-).

# The Biblical Case for “Inauthentic Evangelism”

PAUL F. BRICKER

In his book, *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists* (IVP, 2016), Professor Mark Teasdale offers this definition of evangelism: “Only when we offer the good news of Jesus Christ as that which has touched and transformed our lives does it become meaningful and interesting to others. Only when we are authentic to who we are in Christ is evangelism done well” (p. 3).

Teasdale spends much of the book describing what he calls “the four tools” with which to share the gospel authentically: 1) explaining how God has been good to me, 2) thinking through that experience biblically and theologically, 3) sharing the result with cultural sensitivity, 4) applying that sharing in effective new ways. Having examined those tools, I would like to take the next step and make a biblical case for “Inauthentic Evangelism,” heading to effective, authentic evangelism.

One of the most famous passages in the Bible is the Great Commission: “But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshipped *Him*; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’” (Matt. 28:16-20).<sup>1</sup>

In verse 17 we find two different types of Christians to whom the Great Commission is given. The first group of Christians to whom the Great Commission is given are those Christians who worship the Lord Jesus. Of course, one would expect that the Great Commission would be given to those who worship. But there is a second group of Christians to whom the Great Commission is given. The end of verse 17 states who those Christians are: “but some were doubtful.” My experience with Christians who are full of doubt and doing evangelism is that God eventually changes them to be authentic in their evangelism. Their doubt disappears. What happens if doubtful Christians keep sharing the gospel is that they eventually meet the Lord Jesus in a very profound manner. The promise of this passage is that the worshipful and doubtful Christian meets with the Lord Jesus: “And, lo, I am with you always...” (v.20). So, drawing near to God with a few stabs at “inauthentic evangelism” can result in God drawing near to us and authenticating our message in our own lives (see James 4:8).

The Apostle Paul also endorses both Authentic Evangelism and Inauthentic Evangelism in Philippians 1:15-18: “Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will: the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.”

So, what is a good example of how I have successively shared the gospel in an inauthentic (namely, not coming out of me because of God’s work in me) manner? I was once house-bound due to illness, yet I still wanted to share the gospel. I started telemarketing evangelism, however, not in the manner that one would think. I would pray that God would have the correct telemarketers call me. When I saw a number that was most likely a telemarketer, I would answer the phone by saying: “I have been praying to God that God would send the correct telemarketer to call me and you are the one!” I ministered to many telemarketers all over the country. Many telemarketers would say that they so appreciated my praying with them over the phone. I do think, however, that I was eventually put on some of their “Do Not Call” lists.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless noted, all biblical quotations are from the NASB.

As mentioned in the book review, one of the key passages on the doctrine of relating to others is 2 Corinthians 1:3f: “Blessed be the God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” The progression is: 1. God is the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort. This is who God is. 2. God comforts us in all our afflictions. This is what God has done for me. 3. Then, we share with others who are afflicted the comfort which we have received from God. This is our message. According to this passage every non-evangelist should be a one-hit wonder. They should have analyzed who God is, how God has helped them and then share that comfort which is our personal testimony with others.

As an evangelist I try to figure out 100 ways the Father of Mercies and the God of all Comfort has helped me. I see those ways as separate flash cards within my soul. When a non-believer shares with me a lament, I go through my flash cards of how I have been hurt in a similar fashion as the unbeliever has been hurt and that energizes my statement or question to the unbeliever. The unbeliever might share how their spouse left them. I might think about how my mother felt when my father left her. I might share with the unbeliever: “how awful that rejection was....” This is like what psychologists refer to as active listening. However, at every point of lamentation I am not only moved by the unbeliever’s lament, but I am energized by the comfort that I received from the God of all comfort when I too felt abandoned by my earthly father. This is radically different from active listening. I am in full court press attempting to apply God’s comfort to the unbeliever that God is the Father of mercies (2 Cor. 1:3) in that the Father has sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins and that we need to turn from our sins and receive the Father’s mercy.

Many apologetic books usually quote Jude 3: “that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” This verse is usually used to fire up the reader that he needs to become contentious for the faith. Non-evangelists, however, can find it daunting, or can overdo it and become obnoxious by trying too hard. It is especially arduous when someone confronts wrong belief being expressed by some in one’s own church!

The book of Jude, I think, is the most important book in the Bible on teaching us how to do evangelism. No, it does not teach us how to become contentious like many apologetic books would want us to become. It deals with evangelism with unbelievers within the church. In doing so, it teaches an authentic evangelism that should be behind any sort of evangelistic endeavor. Jude teaches us both how to contend for the faith and how to do evangelism in verses 17-23 under three commands or groups of commands.

Command number 1: “But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, ‘In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts’” (17-18). Here we find the command to remember historical prophesy about what was going to happen to the church, namely, that unbelievers were going to infiltrate the church, so expect opposition and stay calm.

Command number 2: “keep yourselves in the love of God.” Throughout the book of Jude, Jude writes in triplets. The reason is found in this verse. Jude is so caught up in the love of the Trinitarian God that it has affected his writing style so that he writes in triplets. The central key to do evangelism (and in this particular case—evangelism of unbelievers who have crept into the church) is for the person doing evangelism to keep oneself in the love of God. For any Christian to do authentic evangelism one must be in love with God. A Christian should not be a “daisy” Christian: “God loves me..., God loves me not....” An evangelist is a person whose whole life is a whirlwind of activity that flows out of a love for God and a knowledge that God loves the evangelist and the “evangelee” (so as to say).

There are three participials that modify this command to keep oneself in the love of God. I see each of these participial phrases as separate “billows” which set the heart on fire for knowing God’s love for oneself.

1. Participial billow number one: “Building yourself up on your most holy faith” (v.20). How do we build ourselves up in the most holy faith? A. We read the Bible and have our devotions. B. We attend church. C. We take the sacraments. This billow enhances our knowledge of God’s love for us and enhances our love for God which in turn make us an instrument in God’s hand to contend for the faith (or evangelize).
2. Participial billow number two: “Praying in the Holy Spirit” (v. 20). How do we pray in the Holy Spirit? We come to God and ask forgiveness for our sins. We ask our Savior to pour out the Holy Spirit upon us when we pray. This billow enhances our knowledge of God’s love for us and enhances our love for God which in turn makes us instruments in God’s hand to contend for the faith (or evangelize).
3. Participial billow number three: “Waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life” (v. 21). Jude views all of life eschatologically. Jude sees rebellious angels “kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (v. 6). Jude sees Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of sexually rebellious unrepentant people as already being in fire and so our mandate is to become fire fighters for Jesus, to “save others, snatching them out of the fire” (v.23).

Though the evangelist or the person doing evangelism sees people this way, he /she should be a herald of good news. As Professor Teasdale cautions in his book, we should not be people who condemn others. Most everyone has already been condemned way too often. We bring words of comfort and restoration.

Jude views all of life eschatologically not only negatively but positively as well. Jude sees hope. Jude is overwhelmed with hope. Jude see God as the One who can “keep us from stumbling” (v. 24). We often stumble in this life. We might be overwhelmed by our weakness and sins. If we belong to Christ, we have hope. God is going to make us “stand in the presence of His glory blameless” (v. 24). No more guilty conscience!!!! God is going to do even more. Not only are we going to “stand in the presence of his glory blameless” but we are going to stand “with great joy” (v. 24). Now, that’s a message that is delightful to share and delightful to receive.

This billow of hope enhances our knowledge of God’s love and enhances our love for God which in turn makes us instruments in God’s hand to contend for the faith (or evangelism). With these three billows pumping air on a heart set on fire by the love of God, authentic evangelism happens.

Command number 3: “Reach out” (Jude states three different but overlapping ways).

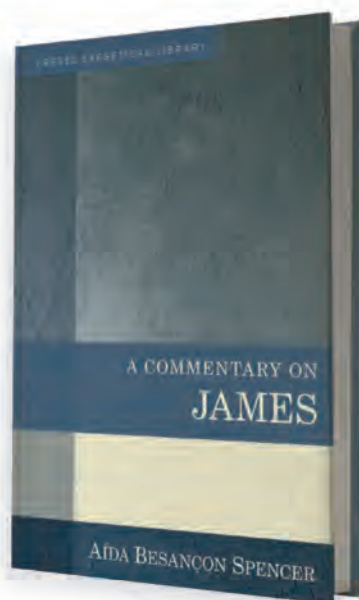
The heart of love of God (and, therefore, the heart of knowing God’s love) is like a volcano which erupts in loving expressions. Here we find three (again notice that Jude expresses himself in triplets) commandments to express God’s love.

1. “And have mercy on some who are doubting” (v. 22). Note that evangelism does not have a condemnation aspect. The heart that is kept in the love of God expresses itself in mercy not condemnation.
2. “Save others, snatching them out of the fire” (v. 23). The heart that is kept in the love of God reaches out into the flames to snatch people out of the fire. There is a heart of love that realizes eschatological realities.
3. “And on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh (v. 23).” The heart that is kept in the love of God reaches out to the lost and shows mercy, while discarding the polluting sin(s), realizing eschatological realities.



Reflections on these biblical bases for evangelism would enhance the witness of every timid “inauthentic” ungifted would-be evangelist to become authentic in sharing the grace and mercy and comfort of what God has done for each of us in sending His Son to save us from our sins.

Paul F. Bricker, B. A. in Philosophy from West Virginia University, M. Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary, helped start Alpha Omega Community Theological School in Newark New Jersey (1974). Ordained as an evangelist within the Deliverance Family of Churches (1978) and ruling elder at New Life Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1979-1985), he planted Emmanuel Church of Deliverance (1977), New Life Bible Church in Philadelphia (1980), Body of Christ Church (1985), and, with other leaders, Pilgrim Church (1989) in Beverly MA. He served also as Pastor of Church Growth for District Three of the West Virginia Conference of the Advent Christian Church (1997-2001), Pastor of Pax Advent Christian Church (2000—2008), co-pastor of Beckley Advent Christian Church, and Hospice Chaplain at the Beckley Veteran’s Administration (2008-present).



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**Aida Besançon Spencer** (PhD, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is senior professor of new testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Her other publications include *Paul’s Literary Style*.

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—Dean Borgman, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary



## Review of *Biblical Eschatology*, Second Edition by Jonathan Menn (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2018)

JOHN T. MCFADDEN

Eschatology is a challenging theme to address in our time. For many Christian traditions—Mainline/Progressive Protestants, Roman Catholics, and even a fair number of Evangelicals—it is at best an afterthought in biblical history and theology. But those who do focus on eschatology often do so passionately, debating the many variants (perplexing to some of us) of millennialism. People have been dismissed from congregations for holding the “wrong” perspective. Preachers sometimes wield their particular eschatological view like a bludgeon, dividing the world (and even their own congregations) into the sheep and the goats. In extreme cases, world events become catalysts for forecasting the exact day of the eschaton (year 2000 was a prime example), leading true believers to hoard supplies or flee to the wilderness. Even some non-religious persons embrace their own version of eschatology: “the singularity”—the point at which artificial intelligence (AI) surpasses human intelligence—is looked to by some with dread, by others with excitement. Religious or not, many wish to know “where all this is going.”

Jonathan Menn is certainly passionate about eschatology, sufficiently so to author an exhaustive book on the topic and then to revise it significantly for this second edition. At nearly 600 pages, counting the extensive appendices and indexes, it is not light reading, but it is a worthwhile one not just for those deeply invested in eschatology, but also for those who have not given the topic much thought. For those in the latter category, Menn offers a number of persuasive arguments for grappling with the subject. To ignore eschatology, he insists, is to disregard the broad sweep of biblical history, a history that reaches its climactic moment in Christ’s death and resurrection but remains uncompleted. It is to ignore substantial portions of the witness of Scripture. Most compellingly, he argues that those who ignore eschatology fail to take Jesus seriously, for his teachings are deeply steeped in apocalypticism. The author’s thorough examination of the Olivet Discourse underscores how central eschatology is in Jesus’s teaching.

For those approaching serious reflection on eschatology for the first time but confused by the many variants and the complex terminology that accompanies them (premillennial, postmillennial, dispensational, preterism, pretribulationism, etc.), Menn offers clear definitions in chapter seven. In each case, he offers a critique that notes both the strengths and the challenges presented. He makes his own amillennial convictions clear, looking to a single cluster of end-time events with no interregnum of one thousand years between Christ’s second coming and the eternal kingdom. However, he offers detailed and fair consideration to the views held by others. Given how passionately those who hold other perspectives defend their views, this will not protect him from vigorous disagreement, even anger, but it is hard to imagine such persons successfully claiming that Menn does not present their convictions in a thorough and balanced manner.

Although writing out of his Evangelical faith and understanding the Bible as the inerrant word of God, he is never guilty of oversimplifying biblical scholarship. I particularly appreciated his argument that, when a writing is clearly intended to be metaphorical, a “literal” reading of the text demands that it be read as metaphor.

The author has spent recent years teaching pastors in Africa, and the African Christian experience deeply informs his thinking. Eschatology and hope are deeply linked for Christians on that continent. However, in an earlier chapter of his life he practiced law, which shapes and forms the manner in which he presents his material: clearly and logically, with each point built upon those that preceded it. Tables, diagrams, and outlines are bountiful and helpful. In the second edition, the author adds these to the index for easy reference. Menn took critiques of the first edition

seriously, and these resulted in a number of clarifications and additions. References have been updated, including a substantial number of on-line resources. He is deeply knowledgeable about eschatological literature, which is cited thoroughly and carefully throughout. Menn has given us a wise, balanced, and thoughtful work that belongs in the curriculum of universities and schools of theology. *Biblical Eschatology* is a major work of scholarship and could fairly be called the most comprehensive book on the subject to date.

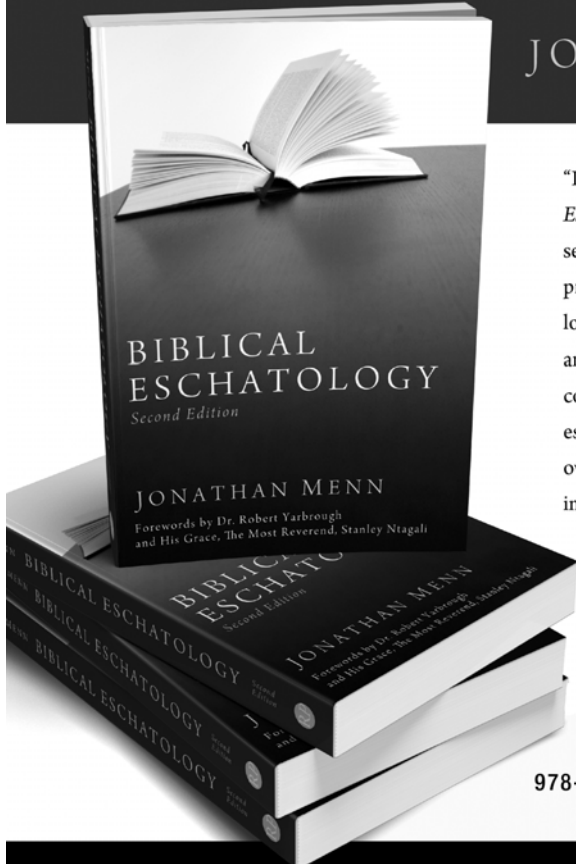
Rev. John McFadden is a retired United Church of Christ pastor who now writes and lectures on issues relating to dementia and serves as a chaplain in memory care facilities. He and his wife, Dr. Susan McFadden, are co-authors of *Aging Together: Dementia, Friendship, and Flourishing Communities*.

Forewords by Dr. Robert Yarbrough  
and His Grace, The Most Reverend,  
Stanley Ntali

*Second Edition*

# BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY

JONATHAN MENN



"I want to commend Jonathan Menn's *Biblical Eschatology* heartily. This book performs a great service for the church, precisely because it is comprehensive in its treatment of all the major eschatological passages in Scripture, detailed and clear in its analysis, fair in its assessments, and passionate in its convictions. Menn identifies the importance of eschatology through its connections with the overall story line of the Bible. He helps us with important principles and guidelines for interpreting eschatological texts. And his passion for the truth of Scripture and its practical impact in the life and ministry of the church is inspiring."

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**Review of *Listening to Sexual Minorities: A Study of Faith and Sexual Identity on Christian College Campuses* by Mark A. Yarhouse, Janet B. Dean, Stephen P. Stratton, and Michael Lastoria (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2018)**

KAREN MASON

*Listening to Sexual Minorities* outlines the findings from the authors' three research studies of sexual minority students on Christian college campuses. The authors define a sexual minority as "a person who experiences same-sex attraction" regardless of whether the person labels him or herself as gay (p. 11). If you do not like reading research studies, skip to the last chapter (Chapter 8 *Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions*). But if you read through the book, you will find many ideas for how to help Christians develop an exegesis of the culture and provide an appropriate support to our sexual minority brothers and sisters. The book offers answers to many important questions such as,

(1) Do sexual minority students attend Christian institutions? The unequivocal answer is "yes." All 160 students on Christian college campuses who participated in the study reported some experience of same-sex attraction or behavior (p. 31). It is important to know that many of the participants did not publicly identify themselves as same-sex attracted to others (p. 32). All except two students out of the whole group of 160 identified as being religious (p. 30).

(2) Why would an individual with same-sex attraction attend a Christian school? The authors found that the most important identity of those with high intrinsic religiosity<sup>1</sup> was their identity as Christians (p. 93). The authors cite Joshua Gonnerman (2012), who wrote: "The central locus of my identity, which shapes all other aspects of it, is Christ" (p. 103). The authors found that Christian sexual minorities want "to learn how to live a good Christian life in the presence of not only of peers but also of mentors who can serve as role models for integrating the life of faith, the life of the mind, and the real world" (p. 50).

(2) How do the study participants navigate being a Christian and experiencing same-sex attraction? The researchers found that Christians who experience same-sex attraction are navigating two identities, their sexual identity and their religious identity. Given the biblical sexual ethic, we may wonder, how do they do that? The authors provide the metaphor of same-sex attracted Christians trying to hold onto two very large and heavy boxes at the same time. The authors explain:

The boxes represent sexual development and religious / spiritual development. It's an awkward and depleting task for these students to manage these cumbersome containers ... but the boxes feel important and, for some at least, significant. So they work responsibly to position their load in their arms in ways that allow for an effective sense of balance as they walk through their college experience. They hope to maintain a grasp that will minimize the threat of dropping one or the other, spilling the contents for others to see (p. 113).

For example, Michelle (a pseudonym) said, "I'm accepting of who I am, but I am also very cautious about not getting too far into letting my sexual identity define me. My first identity is a follower of Christ. Sexual identity doesn't define me" (p. 118). The authors conclude that students in their study "strongly desired a position that held both their sexual development and their religious / spiritual development" (p. 122). This finding leads to the next question we may have.

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<sup>1</sup> Intrinsic religiosity refers to "how religious faith informs what one does and what one believes in all aspects of one's life" (p. 96).

(3) How do they view Christian doctrine? The authors did not find that same-sex attracted students expected the school to change the doctrinal position on homosexuality. But they did find that participants desired a safe space “to learn in a Christ-centered environment” (p. 282). One participant said,

[College leaders] have to remember that there are closeted members on the campus and they’re going to feel alienated. Trying to pretend [same-sex attraction] doesn’t exist is only really hurting them. Offering resources to these kids would be extremely beneficial, and honestly, nonacceptance and intolerance to these issues nowadays is just kind of behind the time and spiritually does not make much sense (p. 283).

*Listening to Sexual Minorities* will increase the reader’s understanding of Christian sexual minorities at Christian educational institutions. The goals of the book are to report on the participants’ lived experiences and to provide Christian educational institutions with recommendations. The authors reflect on how Christian educational institutions can provide a “whole-person relational encounter” (p. 288). The authors do not advise “collective approval for any and all behaviors” (p. 295) but they suggest that a community where people do not agree ought to be characterized by supportive discussion, not micro-aggressions, those comments that communicate derogatory attitudes toward a group. One type of micro-aggression experienced by same-sex attracted Christians at Christian educational institutions is that they are presumed not to exist on Christian campuses. Some of the study participants felt marginalized by the Christian community which made the assumption that no student experiences same-sex attraction. Kevin (a pseudonym) said,

Most people around here have very good intentions. Nobody is actually hostile toward us. And you know, I feel that there is a lot of ignorance because people don’t know how to act around the issue. Most of the time that displays itself in ignorant remarks or other microaggressions, which they are not even aware they are doing (p. 187).

The authors conclude that “Relationships matter” (p. 274). Social support, as a posture,<sup>2</sup> helps these students to manage the identities they are juggling, but allows for “varying gestures, such as challenge or support” (p. 296). The obvious question for Christian educational institutions that uphold the biblical ethic that any sexual behavior outside of a heterosexual marriage relationship is prohibited (Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10) is how to apply consequences in the case of a violation of school policy while acknowledging a Christian’s “depleting” task of navigating dual identities as a Christian sexual minority. It would seem that participants in the study would expect the school to adhere to their policies with both challenge and support, as Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery “Neither do I condemn you. ... Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11).

*Listening to Sexual Minorities* is focused on the research participants’ dual identities of “Christian” and “sexual minority.” While the authors report the ethnic/racial makeup of the sample (Caucasian/White, 81%; African American, 7%; Hispanic/Latin, 4%; Asian/Pacific Islander, 3%), they do not report how ethnic and racial minority participants navigate their additional intersecting minority identities, which bring with them their own set of depleting tasks. Future research by the authors might incorporate a focus on these additional identities.

This is an important book. How Christians show love to sexual minorities is the “social-justice issue of this generation” (p. 304). Christian educational institutions cannot sidestep this call to love all our sexual minority neighbors and to avoid micro-aggressions against them. A first step must be to acknowledge that student bodies are heterogeneous (p. 308) and that Christian sexual minorities are sitting in classrooms. This awareness will necessarily translate into monitoring comments about

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2 See Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

sexual minorities while speaking God's truth. Taking this step will help all students gain a greater understanding that God's moral will does not prevent God from loving the whole world. A side effect may be to move forward the United States suicide prevention agenda to decrease the higher rates of suicidal thinking, attempts and death among sexual minority students.<sup>3</sup>

*Listening to Sexual Minorities* has 320 pages. At the end of each chapter, you will find a helpful section on Chapter Takeaways as well as references and appendices with the original research data.

Karen Mason, Ph.D., is the Director of the Hamilton Counseling Program, Professor of Counseling and Psychology, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton, MA. She is the author of *Preventing Suicide: A Handbook for Clergy, Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors* (IVP, 2014) and co-author with Dr. Scott Gibson of *Preaching Hope in Darkness: Help for Pastors in Addressing Suicide from the Pulpit* (Lexham, 2020). Her research is on suicide prevention in faith communities.



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3 M.C. Lytle, J.R. Biosnich, S.M. De Luca, C. Brownson, "Association of religiosity with sexual minority suicide ideation and attempt," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 54:5 (2018): 644-651. See also in the book pp. 138 and 164.



## Review of *George Whitefield: Evangelist for God and Empire* by Peter Y. Choi, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018)

WOODIE TERRELL

The extensive research Peter Choi has managed in producing this material is daunting. His prodigious examination of the man, George Whitefield, and the tumultuous history that surrounded him (the backdrop of numerous prominent and colorful heroes and villains of his era) make for a stimulating ride through a time now three hundred years past which still is influencing our world today. It was a time of dynamic religious conflict, of Western expansion and colonization, of war and deep shifts in philosophy and science. At this juncture, a fervent religious enthusiasm referred to as the Great Awakening burst open into Britain and beyond her shores.

In Mark A. Noll's *Foreword* to the book, he points to Peter Choi's focus for his research on Whitefield as it follows him beyond his early public career, asking: "What do we learn about Whitefield the person and the message he preached if we examine the twenty-eight years after 1742 with the same care so many have lavished on his early public career" (x). Choi himself is very clear about the trajectory of his research. He states in his Introduction, "The relationship between George Whitefield's religious and imperial agenda represents the central focus of this study" (2). And so it does; almost entirely. Choi goes on to say of Whitefield that, "He was an agent of British culture that used his potent mix of political savvy and theological creativity to champion the cause of imperial expansion" (3).

Choi examines his early years of humble beginnings, a remarkable Oxford education, his early friendship with the Wesley brothers and the Holy Club and by this association access to the Oxford libraries and the varied theological authors of history. Choi notes Whitefield's developing theology of "his own path-breaking emphasis on spiritual rebirth" (4). But it was a "Puritan classic (Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*) that pointed out the worthlessness of outward religious deeds in the absence of inward transformation" (30). The personal conviction it stirred brought him into conflict with the rigorous structure of the Holy Club and later the Anglican Church in which he was eventually ordained. Whitefield also discovered a passion for all people that drove him from the pulpit to the streets, farms, slums, and collieries of London and beyond.

In 1736, Whitefield took this same excitement to the new American colonies. He is well known for his bold preaching in "New England," but what Choi seems more focused on is the extensive time and ministry Whitefield spent in the very new frontier colony of Oglethorpe's Georgia. Choi finds that "The fledgling colony offered the ambitious young cleric a broad field of religious, cultural and political experimentation. Uncovering the central place of Georgia in Whitefield's early American labors helps to reveal the Imperial shape of the great Awakening" (32). At this time, England was expanding as far as China and India. She had raging political and religious conflicts with countries under Catholic Papal rule. Along with most of the Western countries England was reaching across the globe for dominance. Henceforth, it is not hard to understand that Whitefield, as a born and reared Oxford-trained Englishman, a Protestant from childhood, an Anglican by ordination was feeling the excitement and desire to spread this New Birth and seeking other outposts than those within the borders of the Empire. But, in contrast to his British upbringing, Whitefield professed a rather "Egalitarian new birth. Whether impoverished colliers, religious societies that blurred social hierarchy, or London's upper class—[all] revealed Whitefield's faith in the liminal and limitless possibilities in an expanding Protestant Empire" (63). Then again, Choi notes Whitefield's deep religious compassion, which seemed to extend beyond his Protestant boundaries when he experienced a brief stop in Lisbon, Portugal in 1754 during the Easter season and, though grieved by their superstitions, he was deeply touched by the "great earnestness" and



“extempore prayer” of the Catholics, noting that “God even appeared to answer their prayers for rain, with impeccable timing no less” (172-73).

Whitefield’s early vision in Georgia for an Orphan School was open to the poorest of peoples, Native Americans, and children of enslaved Africans, which was a rather radical position for that time. Choi traces Whitefield’s early Puritan position strongly against slavery. When it came to the floundering economy of Georgia, where he hoped his Orphan School would flourish into a college, however, he later troublingly changed his position and became a strong advocate for slavery in Georgia (129). At the same time, he was known for his letters charging their owners to treat the slaves kindly and with respect (89). In one of his sermons, he directs himself specifically to the slaves, declaring, as did Paul the Apostle, “For in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, bond or free; even you may be the Children of God if you believe in Jesus.” He continues with the story in Acts of the Eunuch belonging to the Queen of Candace.<sup>1</sup> This concern does not excuse Whitefield or the North American colonists or those of the powerful colonizing nations of Europe who built their wealth on the backs of enslaved persons worldwide. Separating the peoples of those nations from their era and education is difficult. This is the point I believe Choi is determined in this book to prove: “In point of fact, the imperial Whitefield reveals complex entanglements in the cultural streams of his lifetime” (235). But Choi’s final conclusion I find deeply ignores the rich spiritual influence George Whitefield had on the history and peoples of the early British colonies and even more deeply its push in the years shortly after his death to declare its citizens “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights”<sup>2</sup> to be free from the tyranny and subjugation of the British Crown. As a friend and local pastor commented as we were discussing this book: “If Whitefield was an imperialist, he wasn’t a very good one.” Choi concludes in his epilogue that Whitefield was little more than “an ordinary Englishman who lived much of his life as an imperial itinerant, a presbyter at large who saw the world as his parish” (236). I highly encourage anyone truly interested in the man and teaching of George Whitefield to read or listen to his sermons that extend across his whole career in Britain and her colonies, including those last twenty-eight years (x). From the first to the last I think readers may find an extraordinary man with a passion for the souls of people. His ardent desire was for all people personally to know, experience, and determinately follow the living Christ. Readers or listeners of his sermons may even find he still influences much of the religious history of these former British colonies. The idea that he was simply a British Colonist and personal adventurer, in my opinion, puts a misguided emphasis on his mistakes and failures within the generation of which he was born and lived, and loses the great significance of his foresight and ministry in the Southern Colonies and his all-around inspiration and impetus that has changed this Nation.

Rev. Woodie C.S. Terrell was reared as and was a converted Christian, but wandered off into numerous sideroads, even some Christian-cult-ish ones, until she was mercifully called back to the heart and love of God in Christ our Savior. She gained her Theological Masters online with seven children at home through American Christian College and Seminary. Her focus has been on History and Women’s studies. She thanks Drs. Woodrow Walton and Larry Baker, Bishop and Rev. LaDonna Osborn, and Rev. Pastor Chyanna Mull Anthony of the Osborn Ministries. and many others for their guidance and patience. She is ordained through the International Gospel Fellowship of Churches and Ministries. She is an elder with the Disciples of Christ, and a minister, pastor, teacher and board chair at a local women’s shelter or House of Hope, Outer Court Ministries, where those with broken lives come to find hope and healing in the loving arms of Jesus.

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1 Sermon 14 of George Whitefield, “*The Lord our Righteousness*.” Last paragraph and Acts 8:26-39: <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/whitefield/SelectedSermonsofGeorgeWhitefield.pdf>.

2 Declaration of Independence. One who had a specific hand in its writing was Whitefield’s friend and publisher, Benjamin Franklin.

## Review of *Phoebe: A Story* by Paula Gooder (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2018)

SUSAN FRANKLIN

*Phoebe: A Story* by Paula Gooder is easy to read and meticulously researched. Phoebe was a deaconess at the Corinthian church and patron of the Apostle Paul. The author holds a D.Phil. from Oxford University and the position of Director of Mission Learning in the Birmingham Diocese of the Church of England.

The intriguing story has the qualities of a historical novel, though the author humbly states that it is not a novel, merely a speculation of what might have occurred. The book takes place before the burning of Rome, beginning with Phoebe's arrival in Rome as a courier for Paul, bringing the letter to the Roman Christians. Vivid scene descriptions give readers a glimpse into how the cities of Corinth and Rome differed in architecture and social structure. Dr. Gooder draws the character of Phoebe both from Scripture and research. The book has an extensive bibliography and notes. Peter (the character) declares the theme: "Forgiveness is far more complex than at first what you might think" (147).

The story opens as Phoebe arrives from Corinth to Rome bringing Paul's letter to the Romans. After assimilating to her new community and their high expectations of her as Paul's emissary, she learns to appreciate a new style of worship and church gathering. At last she shares her story. It is in this telling that Phoebe herself newly reveals her past in Rome and more personal reasons she returned to Rome.

Phoebe began life far from Rome. Titus, a Roman soldier, spared her life when the Roman army killed her parents. She suffered many problems typical to being a young female slave in Rome but had a benefactor. Her fortunes turned and, as a wealthy married woman, she settles in Corinth with her husband. After the death of her husband, she hears Christ preached and comes to faith.

Over time, Phoebe realizes her true mission for her journey from Corinth. Her acceptance of God's grace and calling results in a dramatic and purposeful exit from Rome.

Threads of contemporary controversies weave their way through the story: the role of women in church and society, works vs. grace, Jew and Gentile divisions, the law vs. grace, and restraint vs. courage in face of governmental opposition. Heated debate within the Roman community of believers shows how the free will we enjoy gives way to legitimate disagreement between sincere disciples.

I highly recommend this book to any seminary student or professor interested in understanding the world of the early church and how many controversies we still debate originated. But it is more than research pieced together in a story. The notes section at the end of the book adds to the cultural and geographical background for each chapter. Though I wished for more of Paul himself, he remained a distant figure, revealed through letters and third-person accounts from others who visited him while in Rome. However, the tapestry is rich and complete as is. *Phoebe: A Story* has interesting threads woven throughout to appeal to a variety of readers. The story line is compelling, with universal themes of loss, betrayal, forgiveness, and restoration.

The doctrines discussed strike vivid contrasts of Jewish vs. Roman culture, questions and debate points about forgiveness, grace, and equality between men, women, slave, free, Jew and Gentile. This book is a remarkable accomplishment and a worthy reading experience for any Christian interested in exploring early church life through the eyes of those who posed and discussed these questions before the development of the New Testament canon.

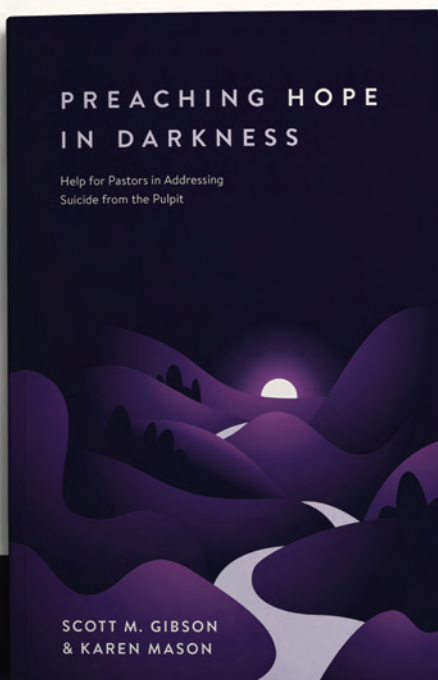
Susan Franklin is a freelance editor, writer, and tutor living in Mansfield, Texas. She earned a B.S. in Bible and Secondary Education from Pillsbury Baptist Bible College. Her work has included developmental editing of the book *Rediscovering Early Church Premillennialism*, home educating two children, teaching English, Speech, and Theater Arts. As a reading interventionist and private tutor, she has helped dozens of struggling students to improve their reading and writing skills and develop a love for reading. You can learn more at her websites: [susanbfranklineditor.com](http://susanbfranklineditor.com) and [classicalstarttutoring.com](http://classicalstarttutoring.com).



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## Review of *Priscilla: The Life of an Early Christian* by Ben Witherington III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2019)

JOHN P. LATHROP

Ben Witherington's newest book is a work of historical fiction; the text is based on events that have been recorded both inside and outside of the New Testament, but the story line has been created. As the title indicates, the book focuses on the life of Priscilla (who is called Prisca throughout the book), a relatively well-known woman in the first-century church. She, along with her husband, Aquila, led house churches in the early Christian movement (Rom 16:3-5; 1 Cor 16:19). In this volume, Prisca is looking back over her life and telling her story, and that of the early Christians, to her adopted daughter, Julia (4). Prisca and her husband rescued Julia during the days of Nero when he had the city of Rome set on fire (148-49). Prisca struggles at times as she tells her story, sharing it with Julia over the course of a number of days. Her struggle is because some of the memories are very painful to share. Julia writes down what Prisca says.

This book may appeal to readers who are interested in the life of first-century believers. It may be of particular interest to those who are studying the place of women in the early Christian community. As the story unfolds, the reader learns about the early Christian movement from one who experienced some of its history. Witherington gives us a "peek inside" the life of the early church. He is eminently qualified to write this book because he is a New Testament scholar who has written a number of commentaries on the New Testament books. Thus, he is very familiar with the history of the time period.

The book opens with the burning of Rome (1-4). As you read a few pages further into the text, you find out that Prisca witnessed this event and has dreamed about it before. This dream has troubled her. The recurrence of this dream prompts her to say that maybe she should have Julia write her story (4). And that is what happens. In the remainder of the book, we are given an account of Prisca's recollections of the events of the past, events from the first century. In the course of telling her story, Prisca speaks about her childhood when she was adopted by a woman named Priscilla and followed her adoptive mother in attending the synagogue. She also speaks about a journey she and her adoptive mother made to the city of Jerusalem, her experience of witnessing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the tensions that arose for Christians in Rome when Caligula was in power, her marriage to Aquila, and their moves to, and ministry in, various cities.

This book has a number of positive features. It contains not only relevant historical information about the time period but also contains pictures of places and items relevant to the story being told. Regarding the practice of the early church, the book affirms the place of women in ministry. Prisca was involved in ministry as a teacher and discipler (47) and she explains that Paul too was in favor of women in ministry (58). If Prisca's words about Paul's view of women in ministry were preserved either in Scripture or in another reliable historical document, they would be helpful in setting to rest the objection to women in ministry. The book also mentions the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Prisca credits the Holy Spirit as the one who directed and prompted the early believers to share the gospel wherever they went (73). In addition, the book supports multiculturalism and ministry in urban settings.

One of the weaknesses of the book is the assumptions that it makes. For example, in the book we are told that the Joanna of Luke 8:3 is Junia in Romans 16:7 (97). I had never heard that before and so I looked up Romans 16 in three different biblical commentaries, I did not find any that said this. Also, in the book Prisca identifies Apollos as the author of the book of Hebrews (24, 162). While he is one of the people who is generally considered a possible author of the book, this may be

a stretch to state it dogmatically. I believe that the decisions to make these identifications are part of creative license. Since the book is an interview with a first-century biblical character, one might assume that they would know some things with greater certainty than we do because they were alive at the time. These views probably reflect Witherington's personal interpretations of the texts. He does this with a couple of other things in the book as well.

This book could be used as a supplemental reading for a course about women in ministry. It might also be used as a secondary text for a New Testament Survey course. In view of the fact that it is a work of historical fiction, I would not recommend it as a primary text for any course.

John P. Lathrop, a graduate of Western Connecticut State College, Zion Bible Institute, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Center for Urban Ministerial Education, is an ordained minister with the International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies. He has four published books and has written for a number of publications including: *Berita Mujizat* in Indonesia, *Christian Trends Magazine* in India, *Pentecostal Pastor*, *The Pneuma Review*, and *Priscilla Papers*. He has also contributed to several books and served as co-editor of the book *Creative Ways to Build Christian Community* (Wipf & Stock, 2013).



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## Review of *Galatians: A Commentary* by Craig S. Keener (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019)

NAMHYO KIM

A highly respected New Testament scholar, Craig S. Keener, recently wrote *Galatians* in the New Cambridge Bible Commentary Series, published by the Cambridge University Press in 2018. It was a shorter commentary with 366 pages that condensed the content and depth of his longer Galatians study. A year later, in 2019, he published the extended study with Baker (894 pages). This volume is the academic documentation that shows how detailed and logical his work is.

The most distinguishing feature of his commentary is his deep and broad understanding of the history, geography, and theological understanding of early Christianity. In fact, Keener is well known for his meticulous and comprehensive four-volume Acts commentary published by Baker Academic in 2013. As an Acts scholar, he already has a thorough knowledge of early Christianity and related issues, and these aspects are also shown in his commentary on Galatians, which is theologically and historically related to the book of Acts. In this regard, the 2019 edition of Galatians is a book that highlights his merits. Before beginning the text commentary, he clarifies the background material needed to interpret Galatians. Of course, he provided this introduction material in 2018, but, this time, “Luther’s Influential Approach,” “An Apocalyptic Letter,” “North or South Galatia,” “Paul’s Opponents,” “Was Paul’s Letter to the Galatians Effective?” have all been added to help readers understand more.

After commenting on the text of Galatians, his commentary goes deeper. Earlier, he used the NRSV in the 2018 commentary, but now his own translations are featured in the 2019 edition. Therefore, the meaning and emphasis of each text he is trying to convey are more in harmony with each text’s translation. Nevertheless, certain familiar phrases and nomenclature that have been used theologically for a long time have been preserved as-is to avoid reader confusion.

Second, an overview of the entire letter to the Galatians, not available in the 2018 version, is provided in this 2019 commentary. Thus, readers can clearly see in what units the author separates paragraphs and conveys meaning.

Third, in the middle of interpreting the text, he added excurses, called “A Closer Look” and “Bridging the Horizons.” “A Closer Look” is a concise but never shallow summary to help readers who are unfamiliar with the background or theological topics covered in the text. The themes of A Closer look added in the 2019 version are as follows: Conversion, Advancing beyond Peers, Nabatean Arabia, New Perspective on Paul, Early Jewish Soteriology, Ancient Wills, Correction in Antiquity, Supporting Teachers, and Crucifixion. “Bridging the Horizons” gives a sneak peek at how the text can be applied to today’s situation. This commentary is not intended as just a textbook for scholars or seminaries, but a sufficient guide for ordinary pastors and even laypeople.

The view of the timing of the writing of Galatians, especially its relationship with Acts 15, does not show consensus among scholars. He adopts a date sometime after the Jerusalem Council because Galatians 2:1-10 probably refers to the event later depicted in Acts 15, but probably before the collection, so perhaps A.D. 50-52 (6-13).

On the question of whether to view πίστewς Χριστοῦ (Gal 2:16; 3:22) as subjective genitive (“Christ’s faith[fulness]”) or objective genitive (“faith in Christ”), which has yet to reach consensus among scholars, Keener introduces the strengths and weaknesses of both arguments. But Keener himself follows the traditional argument of objective-generative reading (177-83).

In conclusion, I would recommend this magisterial commentary to scholars, seminarians, pastors, and Bible teachers. As described above, this book is clearly academically valuable because



it is based on a variety of authoritative primary sources. At the same time, it is a commentary that is considerate, so that even those who lack various theological and historical understandings can understand the issue with its guidance. I believe many readers will enjoy God's truth and grace through this book.

Namhyo Kim is an M.A. in Biblical Languages student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He holds a bachelor's degree in electrical and electricity engineering from Yonsei University and an M.Div. from Chongshin Theological Seminary.

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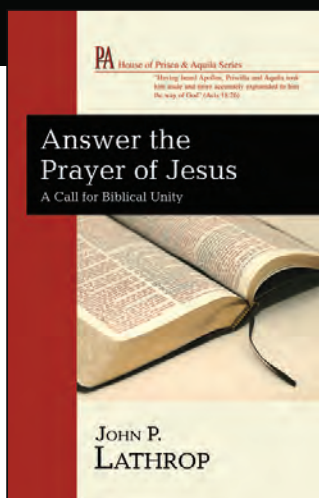
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JOHN P. LATHROP is a graduate of Zion Bible College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is an ordained minister with the International Fellowship of Christian Assemblies and the author of two other books, *Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers Then and Now* (2008) and *The Power and Practice of the Church: God, Discipleship, and Ministry* (2010).

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—ELDIN VILLAFANE, Professor of Christian Social Ethics, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and author of *Beyond Cheap Grace*

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## Review of *The Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology* by James Montgomery Boice, revised edition by Philip Ryken (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019)

WOODROW E. WALTON

What Philip Ryken attempts is an assessment of the 2019 edition of Boice's original work first published in 1986 and originally presented in four separate volumes in 1978, 1979, and 1981 by InterVarsity Press. Rather than an actual revision, what Ryken does is to include the four different volumes into a single enlarged volume divided into four different sections each of which is subdivided into four distinct parts: "the sovereign God" (Part 1), "God the Redeemer (Part 2), "Awakening to God"(Part 3), and "God and History" (Part 4). As would be expected, this enlarged edition has 811 pages which includes an eight-page Scripture Index at the end besides a General Index. A study guide is also provided for each of the four major parts.

Each study guide introduces a summation of each part followed by "key concepts," "questions for study and discussion," "recommended resources," and "questions for personal discipleship." In the eyes of this reviewer, these guides need to be perused by the reader before "diving" into each of the book's four-part divisions. Familiarity with the study guides would give the reader direction in the use of Ryken's expanded edition of *Foundations of the Christian Faith*.

At first this reviewer was hesitant on the advisability of taking four different volumes and transforming them into one large volume of nearly 820 pages, but, after seeing what Ryken has done in providing a "16-Part Study Guide" in addition to keeping footnotes to a minimum of not more than two to a page, this reviewer observes these features make the book less imposing or threatening to the reader. In fact, the book, both without and within its pages, is very attractive. The inside back cover tells the reader about James Boice, who for many years was pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, until his death in 2000. Simultaneous with his pastorate, he had a radio program called "The Bible Study Hour." Factoring in such active ministry, alongside his studies for the ministry at Princeton University where he gained his B.D. and the University of Basel (Switzerland) where he earned a Doctor of Theology degree, gives the reader the needed information that the imposing volume before him is going to be "laced" both with a layman's, and a university student's vocabulary, which balance each other

So, in this reviewer's opinion, this revised and expanded study of the *Foundations of the Christian Faith* is indeed comprehensive and readable for either the layman or the student and can be used within any serious Bible study program within a congregation and also within college or graduate schools. The book comes with recommendations by Michael Horton of Westminster Seminary in California and also Jul Medenblik of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The late Woodrow E. Walton, B.D., M.Div., M.A., D.Min., was a Sr. Retired Assemblies of God minister and a retired dean of a Theological School. Between 1957 and 2014, he served in the pastorate, higher education, and in overseas missions.